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## EDITOR'S NOTES

The theme of the 2011 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, convened in March at Southern Methodist University, was "Empire, Church, *Missio Dei*." Special thanks goes to Dr. Elaine Heath of SMU for developing this program. This issue of the Journal includes select papers presented on that occasion. The questions addressed are sometimes dramatic and clearly of contemporary relevance. What is the proper relationship between the Christian community and established civil governments? What about praying for kings (Wall) or using lethal force in extreme social circumstances (Abraham)? Does Christian evangelism necessarily imply coercion (Jackson)? Are private families the basic political unit for Christians, or is it the church (Moorman)? Might a fresh reading of the book of Jonah yield critical guidance (Riley)? How can Christians engage those of other faith traditions in a healthy manner (Thorsen)?

Questions such as these are addressed here, along with fifteen reviews of new books covering a wide range of subjects. It is never easy to relate constructively and redemptively God's mission, the church, our families, the well-being of the creation, the "empires" of this world, and the many intellectual and missional challenges facing the church. Serious attempts are made in these pages.

The identity of the officers of the Society and their email addresses are available in this issue. The WTS web site is [Wesley.nnu.edu/wts](http://Wesley.nnu.edu/wts). Available there is a searchable CD containing the full content of all issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1966-2010, and much more information about the Society, past and present. The WTS officers to contact for particular needs you may have are:

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Barry L. Callen, Editor  
March, 2012



# **EMPIRE, CHURCH, AND *MISSIO DEI*: ON PRAYING FOR OUR KINGS (I TIMOTHY 2:1-2)**

by

**Robert W. Wall**

**The 2011 Presidential Address**

The purpose of my presidential address is to introduce the theme of this year's meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society: "Empire, Church, and the *Missio Dei*." This theme comes wrapped in a myriad of controversies and contested definitions, some peculiar to our Wesleyan communion. Despite our disagreements, our work together should concentrate on two paramount issues: (1) While sharing a deep suspicion of imperial power, whether practiced by ancient Rome, Wesley's England, or contemporary America, we should admit the empire's boundary-line with the church is difficult to draw with precision, whether politically or theologically. In part this is because the boundary-line is constantly changing as new empires and attendant cultures emerge that challenge the church. Our work together should target how to draw this line more accurately to better understand the interpenetrating and often messy relationship between empire and church.

(2) Christians also share the core belief in a gospel that confronts evil wherever it is found and announces God's victory over the powers and principalities of the present age because of the crucified and risen Christ. This gospel conviction hardly advances a disinterest in political practices or an interest in privatized piety; rather, the gospel compels the church to cultivate all its practices in the unbending belief in the victory

of our loving God who seeks to save the lost, the last, the least, the lame for Christ's sake.

Of course, among the bones of contention, especially debated along the unsettled border policed by our Society's historians, is the concern about how to regard the nature of the church-empire relationship during England's long 18<sup>th</sup> century and how the Wesleys fit within it.<sup>1</sup> This battleground may be extended to include our Society's theologians who debate how these historical reconstructions relate to the theological and practical constructions of this same relationship that target the post-colonial church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But let me assure you that the intention of my address is considerably more modest than trying to settle these debates with which I have little expertise. What I rather want to propose is a Wesleyan theological reading of a single biblical definition of this thematic to introduce and stimulate a broader, thicker conversation among us. So, "Empire, Church, *Missio Dei*: On Praying for Our Kings."

### **The Pastoral Epistles in Canonical Setting**

Perhaps I do admit to some immodesty regarding my choice of a passage from 1 Timothy to retrieve a single biblical definition of God's mission to save the world. Indeed, I admit that Bible scholars routinely cite two passages from the Pauline Pastorals for claiming a Tory Paul—namely, 1 Tim. 2:2 and Titus 3:1.<sup>2</sup> And we all know that the street credentials of these letters is suspect. In fact, it has become axiomatic in NT studies since Harnack to marginalize their canonical status for any number of reasons. Most Bible scholars do not think they were written by the real Paul; and those skeptical of Pauline authorship naturally doubt their apostolicity and so their continuing authority for a self-confessed apostolic church, if a book's apostolicity is also linked to conclusions about its authorship. In any case, the hostile reception of the Pastorals by the mod-

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<sup>1</sup>Esp. see J. Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark, 2009), which introduces Wesley from a distinctively political angle.

<sup>2</sup>Additionally, mention of household practices and virtue catalogs in the Pastorals may also indicate a desire for socio-political stability that de-apocalypticizes the Pauline mission and accommodates imperial Rome in a way that the Acts of Paul or perhaps even the Paul of Acts would not. Note the mention of a Roman government official, "Pontius Pilate," in 1 Tim. 6:13 when discussing Timothy's pledge of allegiance—the only reference of its kind in the Pauline corpus.



ern academy has had a catastrophic effect upon their reception within the church, whose clergy rarely use 1-2 Timothy and Titus any longer in their preaching or catechesis.

So let me engage in a bit of rehabilitation before we get down to business. For this work, let me move the historical project—for practical and for theological reasons—from the moment of composition and away from all those mostly indeterminate issues of “original meaning” and authorship, to the subsequent moment of canonization when this small collection of three Pastorals was added to the Pauline corpus to complete its apostolic witness for an emerging New Testament canon. Significantly, at that historical moment toward the end of the second century, rival traditions were engaged in a battle over the canonical Paul and his apostolic legacy. The addition of the Pastorals to the existing ten-letter corpus helped one side win that battle for the future of the church, we should presume in faithful recognition of prior choices made by God’s Spirit.

Among the unsettled issues being debated by these rival groups was the nature of Paul’s relationship with the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> What is clear from Paul’s standard letters, already in wide use during the second century, is the evident lack of interest in the Roman Empire and its imperial cult. Even though Paul claims that his gospel challenges the powers and principalities of the present evil age, and he himself observes that his gospel was viewed as scandalous by both Jews and Greeks, his standard letters disclose no hard evidence that imperial Rome was an antagonist in his gospel narrative. He mentions no Roman official when he easily could have, no Roman deity or cult. Rome is never accused of executing Jesus or persecuting Paul, nor does he mention his Roman citizenship. And Paul is not a shy guy!<sup>4</sup>

If Paul had a bone to pick with the imperial cult or Rome’s abuse of power, we suppose his letters would have said so. Of course, Paul does mention his imprisonment, although not often and always stated with the-

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<sup>3</sup>For a summary of this debate, see T. E. Phillips, *Paul, His Letters, and Acts* (Hendrickson/Baker, 2009), 97-105.

<sup>4</sup>I am deeply suspicious of immodest historical critical speculation of what first auditors must have heard when listening to a biblical text for the first time. This is a version of arguing from silence, since very little biblical vocabulary is technical and how first auditors heard a text read aloud is finally indeterminate. Again, absent Paul’s own commentary, the interpreter should be cautious is claiming more for a text than is actually written.

ological rather than political ends. Additionally, his language of salvation, while including political metaphors, is not articulated in a technical vocabulary that would have been heard by its first auditors as necessarily anti-imperial, anti-Caesar, or anti-Empire, at least not without his help. My sense in reading Paul's standard letters is that, if he had wanted to subvert the political or religious practices of the Roman Empire, as some now insist, he would have done so as plainly as he targeted the practices of pagan religion or his religious opponents (e.g., 1 Cor. 8-10) if only as a rhetorical foil. This silence is especially deafening when compared to the Paul of Acts whose problems with Rome's political culture, even when provoked by unrepentant Israel, are more clear.<sup>5</sup> What we are left with among those who press for an anti-imperial Paul is an argument from inference, which is not intellectually satisfying.

Of course, Paul's non-interest in Rome may reflect his Jewish conception of divine providence, which does not remove the town square from his gospel narrative but rather assumes that God's activity in the world penetrates every nick and cranny of human existence. Paul's gospel proclaims the reconciliation of all things to God because of the faithfulness of messiah Jesus, which is confirmed by the baptism of his sanctifying Spirit. Nothing more needs to be said.

But I gather Paul's silence about Rome may have provoked some of the confusion surrounding the corpus of Paul's standard letters, about which 2 Peter 3:15 speaks and Paul himself mentions in his Corinthian correspondence. Almost certainly the political ethos had changed by the middle of the second century, when the relationship between the church and the Empire was of greater practical concern. Not only is this already

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<sup>5</sup>I have long argued that Acts provides a canonical context for reading Pauline letters. If the Paul of Acts forms our reading of the Pauline canon, then we can be assured that the apostle is alert to Rome's political culture. He knows when to keep quiet (e.g., in Ephesus; Acts 19) or when to exploit his good relations with Rome (e.g., in Philippi; Acts 16), and he knows the law of the land, which he draws upon when defending his missionary chops (as during his Roman trial; Acts 24-25). But we also just as easily note that Rome nowhere appears as an element of his kerygma, nor it is even an important element of the pattern of his urban mission. Meetings with government officials are almost always ad hoc and at the request of the officials. Paul's mission is always centered in the Jewish neighborhoods of Roman cities and not in town hall. I would argue this same kind of ambivalence carries over to his canonical letters in which an interest in Rome is even more incidental. My point here is that Paul himself does not seem interested in making the political implication of his gospel clear in his standard letters.

signaled by the story of Paul in Acts, but the political relationship between the Pauline legacy and Rome is among the issues raised in the battle over Paul waged during the second century. The popularity of the apocryphal “Acts of Paul and Thecla,” which portrays Paul as an anti-imperialist ascetic, elicited a response from other Paulinists that more clearly related Rome and Pauline orthodoxy, which was preserved by the corpus of his standard letters already in wide circulation. While this relationship may also have been an ancillary benefit of adding the Acts of the Apostles to the emerging Christian biblical canon, I contend that it is the addition of the Pastorals to complete the Pauline canon that made more clear how to read and apply Paul’s gospel in a way that would counter his various rivals and produce greater unity within the post-Pauline church.

The importance of the Pastorals for understanding Paul’s apostolic legacy is set out in the opening address of 1 Timothy, where Paul charges Timothy to stay on in Ephesus because he is departing for Macedonia. It is the absence of Paul and his powerful apostolic charisms that has imperiled the Christian mission in Ephesus. What follows in this and the other Pastoral letters are instructions, succinct formulations of a Pauline grammar of faith, memories of his conversion and mission, memorable one-liners and sound bites that provide guidelines for those left behind in forming Christian congregations in Paul’s absence according to his gospel and apostolic calling.

Hermeneutics is born in misunderstanding and it is directed at specific persuasive purposes.<sup>6</sup> Rather than dismissing the Pastorals as an unimportant add-on, as modern criticism has, I would suggest they are of indispensable importance in guiding faithful readers of Scripture’s Pauline witness in a right application of this apostolic “word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), including to guide a congregation’s political practices.<sup>7</sup> Let’s get down to our business with this in mind.

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<sup>6</sup>M. M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge, 2010), 11.

<sup>7</sup>The importance of Paul’s apostolic presence is nowhere more powerfully stated than in his greeting of Titus where he claims that God has made clear God’s word—the promise of eternal life made ages ago (1:2)—now to him “in God’s own time (*kairos*)” (1:3). That is, the “knowledge of truth,” which is conditional of salvation (so 1 Tim. 2:3-4), is a property of the Pauline apostolate.

**“Pray for kings” (1 Timothy 2:2a)**

Among the common exegetical mistakes made when reading Scripture’s paraenetic literature, such as the Pauline Pastorals, is to treat separate units of instructions atomistically—i.e., as disconnected from each other and so in disregard of a composition’s rhetorical design and theological coherence. Upon closer analysis, careful readers note that these separate units of instruction are typically linked together by the repeated and strategic use of catchwords.

Consider, for example, the catalog of virtues found in Titus 3:1-2, which includes the instruction for a congregation to “submit to rulers and authorities.” This instruction is typically read without due consideration of the repetition of “epiphany” (*epiphainō*; 2:11; 3:4) in the two passages that sandwich this instruction in an expansive and quite wonderful exhortation that extends from Titus 2:11 to 3:8. Moreover, each epiphany text concludes with a claim that the holy effect of the Savior’s appearance in the world (2:13; 3:4) is the production of a community’s “good works” (*kalōn ergoi*; 2:14; 3:8), which bear witness to their “salvation” (2:11; 3:5). That is, in some sense the stipulation of the community’s political practices—e.g., its submission to civil authority (cf. Rom. 13:5)—is elaborated by interplay with these three catchwords: by an epiphany, not of Caesar’s imperium but of God’s grace and loving kindness, which have resulted in the “salvation” of a people from the wickedness that surrounds them (2:14; cf. 3:3) for a life “good works” whose character and consequence align with the very qualities that have “appeared” with God our Savior: grace (2:11), goodness (3:4), and loving kindness (3:4).

The repetition of catchwords in Titus 2:11—3:8, then, cues this crucial dialectic between a community’s political practice—its subjection to secular authority—and its core beliefs about salvation’s apocalypse that explains and motivates those practices. The church’s willingness to submit to the empire’s authority is not characteristic of civil religion but of a people’s faith in the epiphany of God’s grace that has brought salvation into and for the nations (2:11). And it is Titus 3 that adds that stunning (and surprising) image of Pentecost’s Spirit who is poured out by the risen Jesus to churn the waters of regeneration and renewal in which the redeemed community bathes (3:5-6). That experience of new birth sup-

plies the hard evidence that underwrites the gospel's truth;<sup>8</sup> and the experience of transformed existence locates the community's politics within the order of God's salvation.

This same dialectic between political practice and theological belief is often missed in our ongoing reception of 1 Tim. 2:1-2 within the church, and has even supplied a Pauline proof-text for those who claim 1 Timothy is an example of the church's domestication in post-apostolic Christianity. After all, a church that is instructed to pray "first of all" for kings as a peace-keeping strategy (so, e.g., Pervo) is no longer a church that preaches the apocalyptic gospel of the real Paul from the margins of polite society. Quite apart from better historical explanations than this one, closer examination notes again the use of linking words that connect related units of instruction together as bits of a coherent whole. In particular, the repetition of "everyone" (*pas*; so 2:1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11) in 1 Tim. 2 establishes a dialectic between the community's public prayers and the plotline of Paul's narrative of *missio Dei* set out in 2:3-7. Sharply put, 2:1-2 and 2:3-7 are of a piece: the congregation's prayers for the king are glossed by Paul's core beliefs about God's desire to save everyone.

First, let me comment on the congregation's quintessential political practice: prayerful support of the king. Christians are not party to an emperor cult in which they pray to the king; they pray for him. Nor are Christians other-worldly ascetics who are only concerned to flee the world to save their own souls. Some have suggested that the inclusion of a petition for kings, which is emphasized by the repetition of *pas* and *huper*, is counterintuitive of a congregation that might have been inclined not to pray for kings and so possibly offend them. Especially in places where Christians are still a marginal group or under attack from their rivals, managers of the cultural order are typically held with deep suspicion. And, indeed, stories of friction between a powerless people and a powerful state are everywhere narrated in Scripture (e.g., Acts 22-28; 1 Pet. 3:13-17; Rev. 13). Nonetheless, Luke Johnson points out that Jews and Christians, even into the second century, felt a deep solidarity with their socio-political institutions as of a piece with God's care for all

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<sup>8</sup>This dialectic is hermeneutical of Rom. 13:1-7. What is lacking in Rom. 13:1-7 are the theological resources that explain more adequately the relationship between the church and state; these necessary resources are provided by Titus 2:11—3:8 and by 1 Tim. 2:3-7. This is another example of how the Pastorals function hermeneutically within the Pauline corpus.

things. Prayers for civil authority would have been earthed in a doctrine of divine providence.<sup>9</sup>

What should interest us, however, is the use of “king” (*basileus*) in this instruction, which is a striking upgrade when compared to Rom 13 where more modest expressions of political authority (*exousia*, *diakonos*) are used. Moreover, *basileus* repeats the doxological refrain just heard in the letter’s thanksgiving, where God is honored as immortal *basileus* (1:17), a trope that is repeated and elaborated at the end of the letter, strikingly following the mention of Pontius Pilate, where God is declared “the King of the kings” (ο βασιλευς των βασιλευντων). This doxological inclusio not only underwrites the church’s confession of God by which all the letter’s instructions are read, but as such it sets the congregation’s prayers for the empire’s kings within the political boundaries of the *oikonomia theou*, “the economy of God,”<sup>10</sup> where the church’s God is king over the kings of the nations. The ambivalence of praying to the King of kings for the kings of the nations is quite arresting, not only because petitions about kings and lords are received by a God who is also a king, and so fully wakeful to their job description, but because a community that prays to God for the emperor puts the emperor in his place (cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 30). More critically, however, the doxology informs the instruction that all the congregation’s political practices are ordered within the bounds of the *oikonomia theou*, forged by faith and aimed at loving relations (so 1 Tim. 1:4-5).

This same dialectic is cued by repetition of *pas* that links the congregation’s prayers for everyone in 2:1 to the stunning formulation of God our Savior’s salvation of everyone in 2:3-7. Much has been made of the resonance of the salvation vocabulary in Pauline preaching and how his first auditors would surely have heard his letters as anti-imperialist and even subversive—words like gospel, savior, epiphany, peace, kingdom, and so on. Most of these studies are over-determined and anachronistic in my view, especially given Paul’s silence regarding his dispositions toward Roman rule and emperor cultus. Certainly in this particular case, the implied motive for a congregation to pray for the kings is not to counter a latent anti-imperialism, perhaps advanced by false teachers mentioned

<sup>9</sup>L. T. Johnson, *Letters to Paul’s Delegates* (NTC, Continuum, 1996), 129-31.

<sup>10</sup>I think a better translation of *oikonomia theou* in 1 Tim. is something like “God’s way of ordering reality.”

earlier; but the community's prayers are of a piece with God's desire to save everyone. In fact, God our Savior not only desires to save everyone (vv.3-5a) but God's desire has been instantiated for all to see in the messianic mission of the man, Christ Jesus, whose death ransomed everyone from slavery to sin (vv. 5b-6), and in the apostolic mission of Paul, Christ's herald, to teach the nations about faith and truth (v. 7; cf. Acts 9:15).

Much has been made of the purpose clause that follows the instruction to pray for kings in v. 2, which some take as indication that such prayers are really a political strategy of accommodation, if not compromise, to keep the peace.<sup>11</sup> After all, the manner of life described here—"peaceful, quiet, godly, respectful" (2:2b)—is the aspiration of any good citizen. But if the congregation's prayers are interpreted by the following Pauline formula of *missio Dei*, then not only are the prayers but their purpose prospective of the salvation of kings and the sanctification of the public square over which they rule. The combination of the adjectives *ēremos* ("peaceable") with *ēsuchia* ("quiet") is not a redundancy as often suggested, but mutually-glossing expressions that combine internal and personal with external and social experiences of God's shalom that target the entire sanctification of the public square.<sup>12</sup> In any case, that's how I view the dialectic of Pauline peace-keeping in a nutshell. Sedition, clearly not; but salvation, yes.<sup>13</sup>

The guts of the dense theological formula in vv. 5-6 supplies a footnote to the final phrase of verse 4, which implies, in good Pauline fashion, that conversion is a coming to the "knowledge of truth." The crucial question this formula evokes, of course, and this is the pivotal political

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<sup>11</sup>So L. T. Johnson, *1-2 Timothy* (AB, Doubleday, 2001), 195-96, among others. John Wesley is closer to the intent of this text, however, when writing in his Journal on August 12, 1738, that he had exhorted a congregation to "stay close to the church" by obeying the ordinances of God so that it may lead a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

<sup>12</sup>While Paul's use of "acceptable" (*apodektos*) in v. 3 could allude to the OT liturgy of offering acceptable sacrifices in worship of God (cf. Lev. 1:3-4; 17:4; *et al.*), the issue at stake is not that Christian prayers have replaced Judaism's priesthood as the normative medium for cultivating a godly presence; what pleases "God the Savior" are not cultic sacrifices but petitions that agree with God's desire to save everyone and everything.

<sup>13</sup>I trade on Kavin Rowe's memorable one-liner in *World Upside Down* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), "new culture, yes—coup, no" (5).

question as well, is this: which narrative of salvation should the nations embrace as true? Which narrative should inform and form our political practices? Similar to Titus 3, the dialectic of this passage, facilitated by its linking words, makes it clear that the church's missional task among the nations is truth-telling, and this truth is set out "in the nations" as the essential elements of Paul's particular witness to the *missio Dei*.

(1) "There is one God." This apt summary of Jewish monotheism also serves to locate kings and presidents in their proper place within the *oikonomia thea*. The singularity of God, of course, is an affirmation of the OT 'Shema (Deut. 6:4) and held special importance in Paul's Jewish diaspora where Israel's God had competition from many deities, local and national. While monotheism is not a seditious claim, it certainly does disabuse the prayers for one's king as the practice of a domesticated church. Moreover, also challenged is any notion that supposes God has multiple plans of salvation, one for the church and another for pagans: one God has one desire and it is to save everyone and everything.

(2) "There is one mediator between God and humankind." Paul's insistence that there is but one mediator, Christ Jesus, could have communicated a political message that rejected the king's role as the sole medium of the gods. One God, one Messiah, one salvation all form a particular, exclusive conception of the truth and how it arrives in the empire.

Although laden with Christological freight, especially with inferences of the crucified Christ's mediation of God's new covenant (esp. Heb. 8-10), Paul's primary meaning here is more diplomatic. God's offer of universal salvation is tendered by a single ambassador; to receive it from any other source on any other grounds is bogus. Paul's subsequent reference to himself as preacher and apostle (2:7), who is appointed by the command of God (1:1; cf. Titus 1:1-3), suggests an ambassadorial motif: he is Christ's "undersecretary" in God's kingdom who is given the task of communicating God's Word in Christ's absence. There may well be an even deeper inference that in Paul's absence, it is now Timothy who is given this crucial task to perform.

(3) "A man, Christ Jesus." The reference to Jesus' humanity seems awkward at first. Some suggest that it goes best with the next phrase that speaks of Jesus' death. Certainly Paul's Adam-christology requires this connection to the Lord's humanity and his self-sacrificial death (cf. so Phil. 2:6-8). Yet, I doubt this connection is intended here. In 2 Timothy 2:8, Paul exhorts Timothy to "remember Jesus Christ, raised from the



dead, a descendant of David,” which sums up his gospel. The mention of Jesus’ membership in David’s royal family—he is royalty—may be politically prompted, given that in the next line Paul says this claim has resulted in his imprisonment (2:9). But I also doubt any of this is in play here in 1 Tim. 2, where Paul extends his reference to Jesus’ humanity as is messianic broker of God’s promised blessing for all the families of earth. Moreover, if an expansion of the prior claim that God desires every person to come to a knowledge of truth, then Christ’s humanity includes an epistemological role: God’s self-revelation in one of us—“a man, Christ Jesus”—makes clear God’s desire to save every one of us.

(4) “[Christ Jesus] who gave himself a ransom for everyone.” In Paul’s social world, payment of a “ransom” freed slaves from indenture; and perhaps the most important biblical typology of God’s way of salvation is God’s liberation of an enslaved Israel from their captivity to a pagan power to live in their land and freely worship their God. The politics of worship, which supplies an important subtext to the present instructions, is shaped not by Rome but by this Exodus story.

Yet, the reader may well have expected a more traditional Pauline dogmatics: “who gave himself a ransom for sin” (cf. Titus 2:14). Instead Paul repeats “for everyone” (*hyper panton*; cf. 2:1) since under the present circumstances he is pressing for the global scope of God’s salvation as the principal theological motive why the congregation should pray for everyone, including their pagan rulers. Sharply put, Christians pray for everyone in agreement with God’s chief desire.

Paul’s mention of the Lord’s payment of a “ransom”—one crucified Messiah in trade for all sinful humanity (cf. 1:15)—would have special currency in a Roman urban center with its huge slave population and could have evoked images of a ransom price paid to set a slave free. Further, the prefix of the distinctive word Paul uses for ransom (*antilytron*), *anti-* (“instead”), adds the nuance of a substitution to the root word for “ransom” (*-lytron*) to make decisive that Jesus exchanged his life as a man on behalf of everyone else. The very idea of a person substituting his life for a community or nation is the noblest definition of covenant loyalty in the holy texts of Paul’s Judaism (see 4 Macc. 6:29; 17:21-22; 2 Macc. 7:37-38; cf. Deut. 32:36; Mark 10:45).

But the implications of this element of *missio Dei* are several. The historical specificity of the crucified man, Christ Jesus who alone mediates the truth about God to every other human provokes what has been

dubbed “the scandal of particularity.” The truth about the *missio Dei* is not an amorphous theological abstraction but is contextualized and known from the life and work of a particular Galilean Jew. On the one hand, the church’s response to this scandal is careful hermeneutics: God’s redemptive desire, universal and ongoing, must be interpreted for an ever-changing “everyone” based upon a close reading of the Christ event as witnessed by his apostles. This is hard work; this is the church’s work and especially the work of its faithful magisterium. On the other hand, it is the ongoing role of the Spirit to apply Christ’s work. I note again that extraordinary passage in Titus 3 which claims that this same cruciform Jesus, the one who stands between God and humanity, now pours out the Holy Spirit “on us.” That is, the knowledge of truth about God’s salvation, which is disclosed in that cruciform man, Christ Jesus, is applied to the pluriform community by his Spirit.

I should add in passing that there is hardly a clearer biblical prop available to Wesleyans than this to underwrite the doctrine of universal atonement, which Jason Vickers rightly calls the “linchpin of Wesley’s covenantal Arminianism.”<sup>14</sup>

(5) “Paul was appointed a herald, an apostle . . . and a teacher of the nations in matters of faith and truth.” The formula’s final line is hardly incidental to a biblical conception of *missio Dei*. The idea of Paul’s apostleship is a core thematic of the Pastorals, no longer in defense of Paul’s apostolic vocation but rather to define it, I take it with an eye toward the apostolicity of the canonical collection of his letters. In any case, nowhere else in Scripture is the purpose of Paul’s apostolic appointment more clearly stated than here: he is called to teach truth to the nations—an appointment that is framed for Scripture’s readers by Paul’s prior story in Acts, which plots his prophetic commission to carry the Lord’s name “before the nations and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), so that everyone may “come to knowledge of the truth” and be saved from death for eternal life.

But this formula not only defines the missional nature of Paul’s apostleship but also of the community that confesses itself to be apostolic. As J. Webster puts it, “apostolicity is the church’s standing beneath (Christ’s) imperious directive, ‘Go.’”<sup>15</sup> Wesleyans understand the

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<sup>14</sup>J. Vickers, *Wesley* (T&T Clark, 2009), 87.

<sup>15</sup>J. Webster, *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge, 2002), 51.

church's apostolic mark within the bounds of the magisterial reformation, that is, in terms of Scripture whose instruction is paraded and practiced because it faithfully coheres to the apostolic witness of the Incarnate Word. But in doing so, Scripture is used by Christ's Spirit in service of the church's apostolic existence. The apostolic word forms a people that engage in the same missionary calling and movement that engaged the apostle, apart from which the church simply cannot claim to be apostolic.<sup>16</sup> And so v. 7 also formulates the church's apostolic calling and movement into the nations.<sup>17</sup>

I should note that there is hardly a battleground more fiercely waged in the public square than over rival notions of faith and truth. In this regard, the following profile of the prudent woman (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9-15), when glossed by the preceding theological formula, personifies Paul's apostolic mission to the nations. Grounded in the biblical story of Eve's salvation from sin (2:13-15a), the social practices of influential Christian women exemplify the transforming power of God's grace in the public square. In fact, the repetition of *ēsuchia*s/*ēsuchia* in 2:11-12, which on the one hand defines more narrowly the woman's classroom disposition toward her male tutor in ancient Ephesus, exemplifies more generally the church's social manners among the nations that target the peaceable effect of God's entire sanctification of public places (cf. 2:2b).

## Conclusions

(1) Paul's gospel is not a political counter-narrative that targets Rome's imperial culture. Paul's opponent is God's opponent, which is death; and his apostolic response to death is to herald the apocalypse of God's salvation to the nations, which has already been realized because of Christ and experienced in the Spirit. Sedition, no; salvation, yes.

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. J. G. Flett, *The Witness of God* (Eerdmans, 2010), 240-85.

<sup>17</sup>That is, the Spirit who baptizes the church into this apostolate also empowers the church to continue to herald and teach faith and truth in the nations. The church has no choice but to follow the canonical Paul's example of apostolicity and so be led by the Spirit into the public square to make disciples of the nations (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Of course, it was the risen Jesus who warned Paul that he would suffer (Acts 9:16); so should the apostolic assembly expect to suffer (cf. 2 Tim. 1:8-14; 2:1-7; 3:10-13), since there is hardly a battleground more fiercely waged in the public square than over competing notions of faith and truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-9).

And yet I agree with those who have observed that Paul's post-Augustus world was saturated with and shaped by Rome's imperial narrative—a political narrative that championed, even deified the emperor as savior and proclaimed the value of good works and religious piety dedicated to the empire's well-being in the confidence of a favorable destiny of peace and prosperity promised by the gods. As a matter of course, the publication of Paul's gospel had the capacity to reinterpret and critique these accepted social conventions. By coming to knowledge of truth about one God will inevitably subvert the truth of any rival narrative; and there are very few soft edges along that boundary!<sup>18</sup>

But the narrative carried and taught by the apostolic community should not feel compelled to respond to every jot and title of these rival narratives. The Apostle didn't. And so I take it that a political polemic is not a crucial element of the church's participation in the *missio Dei*. Apostolicity is primarily talk of the church's Lord and his kingdom rather than his disciples and their worlds.<sup>19</sup> But if I'm right about this, these two narratives of rival truth claims will collide, and their loud collision, if managed by the Spirit rather than by political rhetoric, will sound an awakening.

Our primary concern, then, should be to catechize our membership into a more robust understanding of the gospel's narrative, baptized by the Spirit into waters of renewal and rebirth. When the nations witness this narrative proclaimed and that baptism experienced, the powers and principalities will be disturbed and unsettled because "even the demons believe, and they shudder" (Jas. 2:19b).

(2) The exegetical problem of Rom. 13 is driven by a practical problem, reflected in the history of its reception: the church's uncritical compliance with Paul's instruction to give political and financial support of civil authority, even when it offends its appointed role in the economy of grace as a *diakonos theou*. The practical problem is that Paul's instruction to

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. J. B. Green, "Rethinking 'History' for Theological Interpretation," forthcoming in *Journal for Theological Interpretation* (2011). Parker Palmer makes the provocative claim that "the human heart does not, as some have claimed, possess an unyielding desire for democracy. There is a lot in the human heart that desires totalitarianism . . . (and) that desire can lead us down the path of evil;" in "The Heart of Politics," *Bearings* 2.1 (2010) 6.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Webster, 50.

give political and financial support of civil authority comes without motive or theological explanation, and with an appeal only to let conscience guide its application. The interpreter will typically impose additional constraints upon this messy relationship between church and state, whether from personal experience, church dogmatics, or based upon the practices of a particular religious tradition; but Paul does not. If one accepts the role of the Pastorals within the Pauline corpus, recognized at the point of canonization, the performances of 1 Tim. 2:2 and Titus 3:1 could be employed to amplify the theological motive of Rom. 13 and its exhortation of the church's support of civil authority. That is, reading Rom. 13 glossed by 1 Tim. 2:1-2 assumes this dialectic between a congregation's political practices, such as paying taxes (Rom. 13:6-7), and a Pauline understanding of *missio Dei*, which not only informs our Christian conscience (Rom. 13:5) but transforms our citizenship at holy ends—that is, as the means by which God's grace can have its way on everyone, so that every neighbor will come to a knowledge of truth.

(3) How might a Wesleyan theological reading of 1 Tim 2 contribute to our understanding of *missio Dei*?<sup>20</sup> Let me make four sweeping generalizations before offering three quick probes from Wesley's sermons.

1. One should recognize a similar dialectic in Wesley's political theology that we have observed in the canonical Paul: while neither is interested in taking direct aim at the Empire's imperial practices, the public effect of their missionary practices and proclamation of God's gospel helped turn their social worlds upside down. For both Wesley and St. Paul, our slogan might be sedition, no; salvation, yes; however, with the full awareness that the effect of salvation by grace through faith changes everything.<sup>21</sup>

2. A Wesleyan theological reading of Scripture is not an intuitive theological exercise by scholars who happen to be confessing Wesleyans. Without denying the importance of our theological intuitions, honed by the means of grace at our religious locations, the primary source of a

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<sup>20</sup>For this, see my earlier studies included in the collection, *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways* (B. L. Callen and R. P. Thompson, eds. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2004).

<sup>21</sup>Cf. T. R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (KB, Abingdon, 2001).

Wesleyan theological grammar is Wesley himself, especially his standard sermons and Explanatory Notes.<sup>22</sup>

3. It is in several sermons as well as his Note on Romans 12:6 that Wesley sets out his “analogy of faith” that regulates the plain sense of every reading of Scripture, including 1 Timothy 2:1-2. Quite simply, John Wesley’s analogy of faith is the *missio Dei* to save everyone, including believers, from every sort of sin.

4. A Pauline conception of salvation is profoundly theocentric, a grammatical point that has led certain Protestant groups to embrace a passive sola fideism. Of course, Wesley’s dialectic between God’s free grace and humanity’s free will supplies an important subtext to this Pauline formulation of *missio Dei* in 1 Tim. 2: whilst God desires everyone saved, God’s grace is not coercive but cooperative. God’s desire is only realized in those who respond in trust and with the tasty fruit of genuine repentance.

Now I will set forth three quick probes that offer a Wesleyan theological gloss on 1 Timothy 2:1-7. (1) In his “Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley contends that salvation is a trope for the saving work of God (I.1, 2:156), from preventing grace to entire sanctification. Instead of supposing that only non-believers or the elect are the exclusive targets of divine love and instead of reducing salvation to the individual’s eternal life after death, Wesley pushes the extent of God’s desire for everyone’s “full salvation” beyond the non-believer’s justification by faith to include the different degrees of the believer’s sanctification by an ever-growing faith in a living God who makes good on biblical promises made.<sup>23</sup> Wesley glosses the Pauline conversion “to knowledge of truth” not only by pressing for its real assurance in the believer’s experiences of divine love and the Spirit’s internal witness of belonging, but by understanding a thicker

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<sup>22</sup>I would add, however, that Wesley’s analogy of faith, which is soteriological to the bone, must be glossed by the apostolic Rule of Faith, which, as J. Vickers argues, is more fully Trinitarian in substance and no less soteriological in effect; *Invocation and Assent* (Eerdmans, 2008), esp. 1-28.

<sup>23</sup>In fact, John Wesley pays little attention to the non-believer’s justification by faith, which argues against a Pauline conception of this element of his *via salutis* as the centerpiece of an “analogy of faith”; *contra* S. J. Koskie, “Reading the Way to Heaven: A Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Brunel University (England), 2010. Despite our disagreements over critical points, I consider Koskie’s work an important and clearheaded contribution to the ongoing conversation of a Wesleyan theological hermeneutics of Scripture.

conception of sin—not only of its guilt and power eradicated by justification but of its residual occupancy in the believer’s soul that only gradually is vacated by cooperating with God’s sanctifying grace. In my mind, Wesley’s emphasis in this sermon on the faith and repentance in play during the entire sanctification of believers extends the universal scope of the *missio Dei* to include those who have already been found by God but whose experience of God’s salvation is still not yet full.

(2) In part two of “Scriptural Christianity,” Wesley boldly sets out the implication of a pattern of *missio Dei* intent on “saving the whole world lying in wickedness.” He is clear that those who love wickedness will not respond passively to a gospel that makes its way into the world and promptly seeks to turn it upside down. The world will be offended when what is presumed right and reasonable is exposed as wrong and foolish. Wesley realistically describes the rage provoked by the spread of Christianity in the nations in what amounts to a midrash on the narrative of Paul’s mission in Acts.

(3) Finally, in “New Creation,” Christ’s mediation between God and humanity, which targets the salvation of human creation, gets reread by Wesley as of a piece with God’s desire for a new creation in which not only is everyone saved from death but everything is saved from death to live forever in a renewed creation. To put the matter sharply, a Wesleyan theological conception of *missio Dei* is the entire sanctification of everyone and everything. This is the new creation where heaven and earth meet as envisioned in the final images of John’s Apocalypse; it is a sanctified place that includes all God’s creatures, non-human and human, animate and inanimate, all of whom encircle the throne of the triune God to participate in *koinonia* of an unending doxology.

### **The Benedictory**

And now the benedictory. On the last page of the Sunday worship folder of our Free Methodist congregation in Seattle is a “weekly guide to intercession.” It contains a list of prayer requests mostly made by members of our congregation for missionaries and loved ones. Always included last is an exhortation for us to pray for political leaders, with 1 Tim. 2:1-2 cited as the biblical cue, but without further guidance for doing so. For what should a Wesleyan congregation pray when petitioning God for our kings? How do we pray for President Obama?

Our inclination, I suppose, is to pray for his political wisdom, for his sense of justice for all, for his commitment to the poor and powerless. We should pray that our president practices shalom. But if we are properly cued by Paul's instruction in 1 Tim. 2, we are motivated to petition God for the salvation of our kings as well. Stephen Mott reminds us that conversion to Christ is the first path of justice.<sup>24</sup>

Especially in our Wesleyan communion, whose petitions should be analogical of a scripture way of salvation, prayers for our civic leaders should also recognize that sin fractures human relationships and subverts truth-telling. Sin produces a political circumstance that oppresses and exploits others, especially the poor and powerless. And so it is an effect of God's full salvation worked out even in our kings that provides the possibility of a countervailing political circumstance that envisions a reordered society patterned after the *oikonomia theou* whose aim is love (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4-5). Of course, when a president is a professing brother, then our congregations will also intercede for a member of Christ's body who, when made holy by God's sanctifying grace, will need our prayers of support to face up to the conflict his works of repentance will surely provoke this side of the Lord's coming victory.

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<sup>24</sup>S. C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (Oxford, 1982), 110.



# **LETHAL FORCE IN A WORLD OF MARKET STATES**

by

**William J. Abraham**

If terrorists come knocking down my door, I want to have soldiers and a helicopter nearby. What do other Wesleyans want? And what theological and philosophical resources should we deploy? By terrorists I mean those who are prepared to kill deliberately innocent civilians for political purposes. In Ireland this has been a harsh reality for over a generation, so I shall draw on this. In the space available I can only skim through three options, all of which have shown up within recent Wesleyan or Methodist theology. These options are (1) the Liberationist option, (2) the Pacifist option, and (3) the Just War option. Let me begin with a terrorist incident.

## **A Terrorist Incident**

Around 8.15 a.m. on Friday, January 16 1981, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and her family were the targets of a terrorist attack. At least three loyalist gunmen tore out the phone lines to her country home near the town of Coalisland, used sledgehammers to break down the front door, and opened fire, hitting her in the chest, arm, and thigh. They went on to shoot her husband in the kitchen; their three children were not harmed. It so happened that a patrol of the Third Parachute Regiment was in the area at the time, heard the shots, and rushed to the house. While some of the patrol gave the wounded couple first aid, one of the soldiers ran to a neighbor's house, commandeered a car, and drove to another home to telephone for help. In time a helicopter airlifted the wounded McAliskeys first to a hospital in Dungannon and then to the intensive

care facilities at Musgrave Park Hospital in Belfast. Three men were arrested immediately and later charged with a raft of terrorist activity.

It was worry about various forms of state terrorism that fuelled the rage and activism of Bernadette Devlin as a student. After meandering through the underworld of Irish nationalism and violence, she has come to admit defeat. She believes that in the carefully manipulated Peace Process the British and Irish Establishment have outwitted the leadership of Sinn Féin once again. Irish nationalism and British imperialism have worked together to submerge the ideology of republicanism.

The republican ideology has been abandoned for constitutional, nationalist all-class alliances. And every time that it has happened, it has benefited the greedy who aren't the members of Sinn Féin—they're the members of Fianna Fáil, they're the members of the unionist party, they're the members of the national bourgeoisie of Ireland. Every single time that this new alliance has been created, the people who have suffered have been the poor in Ireland. The dissidents in Ireland. The radicals in Ireland. The women in Ireland. And at every single point, this kind of politics has been bad for the people who have always mattered [to us]—bad for the people that mattered to the leadership of Sinn Féin, and bad for republican politics—bad for republicanism.<sup>1</sup>

In the last analysis, the capacity to create an independent, sovereign, free and socialist Ireland has been undermined. The struggle for equality, human rights, the working class, and socialism has been arrested; it is time to go back again to the drawing board of socialist politics.

It is interesting that Bernadette Devlin McAliskey nowhere mentions liberation theology as an option in her journey. Clearly this would have fit nicely with her Catholic background, her opposition to imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, her skepticism about parliamentary democracy, and her enthusiasm for a revised version of Marxism. It would also have given her a whole new angle on terrorism.

### **Options for Countering Violence**

There appear to be three classic options available for addressing violence. I will review and critique each, especially recognizing the new setting of this world's market states—rather than the older nation states.

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<sup>1</sup>See Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, "The Peace Process. . .," <http://irelands-own.net/McAliskeySpeech.html> [accessed 02/26/2007].

**1. The Liberationist Option.** The core of liberation theology is to look to the story of the poor and marginalized to provide guidance on how to respond to social and political problems. In the Irish situation, this story is radically different from those supplied by the rival nationalist groups, for these latter stories are ultimately stories of dominance. They maintain the fabric and morale of the group and their institutions, and they shape the identity of and response to outsiders. While they draw on biblical images and on rival confessional histories, they fail to capture the real issues at stake. The real issues are economic and need to be analyzed in terms of class.

Thus, in the judgment of the Irish Presbyterian theologian Terence P. McCaughey, British administrations are mistaken to see paramilitary organizations as the root of the disease. These are simply symptoms of “a disease somewhere near the real root cause of which is their own stubborn neo-colonial presence in the island. . . .”<sup>2</sup> This causal insight is readily visible to the poor, as happened over two hundred years ago when Jemmy Hope, a poor weaver from Templepatrick, “offered what may well be the most penetrating analysis of what went wrong.”<sup>3</sup> Hope insisted that the condition of the laboring class was the fundamental question at issue. Given this account of the problem, the solution is to follow the lead of Ireland’s homegrown socialist, James Connolly, and join in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, challenging the consumerist free-market economy, insisting on genuine neutrality that really opts out of the Western military alliance, and pursuing educational policies that extend a first-class education to more than the affluent. In the latter instance,

Much more important than ensuring that there is a crucifix on the wall of the school assembly hall is to ensure that those who pass by through the school discern the crucifixion at the heart of the society in which they are growing up. At its best, Christian involvement in education has been the believing community’s response to the voice of the unheard as they cry out to be liberated from enslavement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Terence P. McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption, Church, Politics and Prophetic Redemption in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1993), 59.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 97.

McCaughey's appeal to liberation theology is no more helpful in responding to the problem of terrorism in Ireland than it is in responding to what happened in New York on 9/11. First, it is obvious that in both cases the agency of the terrorists is buried within a network of Marxist or quasi-Marxist causal categories that are unpersuasive and misleading. It is these obsolete categories, which have themselves been used *ad nauseam* to underwrite brutal forms of state terrorism, that do the heavy lifting by way of explanation. Religious categories are left behind in the dressing room. No doubt this is one reason why they do not show up in the proposals of Bernadette Devlin McAliskey; for her, religion supplies at best a moral starting point for sympathy with the oppressed and the poor. The real causal factors are economic; and the lead agents in this world are capitalists, imperialists, and colonialists. Terrorists in their radical particularity are first submerged and then quietly drowned.

Second, it is no doubt touching to appeal to the grandiose insights of a fifteen-year-old, semi-illiterate weaver from Templepatrick as representative of the poor of his day, but it is daft nonetheless to trust that he gets his economic sums right. Jemmy Hope may have heard that Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* came to be known by the late 1790s as "the Koran of Belfast,"<sup>5</sup> but millions of poor have opted for the real Koran. So, if we appeal to the poor of the world to find out what is really going on in society and politics, we will soon find ourselves living in a very different world from that depicted by any version of Marx we may favor. Once we let the poor speak for themselves and tell their own stories, we will quickly discover that they present radically different stories from the quasi-Marxist stories presented on their behalf by their self-appointed representatives in liberation theology.

**2. The Pacifist Option.** The central idea of pacifism is that disputes are to be settled without recourse to violence or force. One obvious advantage of pacifism is that it provides immediate moral justification for the rejection of terrorism. If recourse to violence is generally rejected, then terrorism is rejected; other ways of resolving disputes must be sought. The problem is that the cure proposed by pacifism turns out to be worse than the disease. By rejecting all use of lethal force, we are bereft of crucial resources in protecting innocent people from lethal attack. Applied to the response to terrorism, pacifism would require that we

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 122.

respond to terrorism without the use or sanction of lethal force. We would have to deal with terrorism without armed police and soldiers. More generally, pacifism entails that we have to construct states without recourse to the ultimate sanction of force. On the face of it, this whole way of thinking is nonsensical. It is not surprising that few can take this option seriously once they attend to its implications.

Yet the commitment to pacifism dies hard. It is useful to sort out the crucial options by means of distinction. On the one hand, there are pragmatic pacifists who hold that rejecting the use of lethal force will actually work in the end, even in disputes with terrorism. The claim in this instance is empirical: if we seek out and catalogue non-lethal ways to resolve disputes, these tested practices will work as a response to terrorism. On the other hand, there are religious pacifists who ground their rejection of lethal force in divine revelation. The claim in this instance is theological: God requires us to eschew the use of lethal force to resolve disputes whatever the costs in suffering and death. One can, of course, mix and match the grounding here, but it is important to be clear exactly what is being offered and not to equivocate on the relevant evidence. I shall not here unpack why I think pragmatic pragmatism is a bogus option.

Religious pacifists are right to reject the logic of pragmatic pacifism. Their case does not rely on a happy outcome to just peacemaking practices; they simply see pacifism as a practice in and of itself. They oppose the use of lethal force as a matter of principle. In the Christian case, they accept this principle as a matter of obedience to the divine will. While they readily commit to peacemaking practices, their commitment to pacifism may in no way depend on their success. Indeed, empirically they may well reject the logic of pragmatic pacifism; they expect and accept suffering and death rather than engage in the lethal use of force.

Accepting suffering and death is not an irrational option, for the commitment to pacifism in this instance is grounded in divine revelation. Given that divine revelation is the strongest possible warrant for a course of action, religious pacifists refuse to allow suffering and death to count as a decisive counter-argument against their position. They may well feel the temptation to take up arms in self-defense or to protect their neighbors, but such temptation is to be resolutely resisted. In the most recent forms of Christian pacifism proponents have stressed that the practice of pacifism rests substantially on essential church practices without which the commitment to pacifism will fail.

The practice of pacifism becomes a matter of faith from top to bottom. Both its grounding and its execution depend on divine revelation and divine grace as mediated through Jesus in the church. The issue is theological: Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, revealed how we should live (he rejected the use of lethal power); he manifested the consequences of such living (suffering and death); he committed his followers to forgiveness and reconciliation (in his life and moral mandates); and he made available the power to live in this manner (in his resurrection and through Pentecost). Once we step inside this world, we need no further warrant for pacifism. Nor can we give reasons for stepping inside the world of divine revelation, for the commitment to divine revelation is ultimate; it does not rest on reason.

Stanley Hauerwas goes even further and insists that the truth about politics and war can only be known inside his world of divine revelation.

Christians believe that the true history of the world, that history that determines our destiny, is not carried by the nation-state. In spite of its powerful moral appeal, this history is the history of godlessness. Only the church has the stance, therefore, to describe war for what it is, for the world is too broken to know the reality of war. For what is war but the desire to be rid of God, to claim for ourselves the power to determine our meaning and destiny? Our desire to protect ourselves from our enemies, to eliminate our enemies in the name of protecting the common history we share with our friends, is but the manifestation of our hatred of God.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, those educated at Goshen College (a college sponsored by the Mennonite Church, one of the pacifist Christian denominations) are in a better position to know the truth about the political world than those educated at Duke University. In a commencement address, Hauerwas said:

For political science is not taught at Goshen College the way it is taught at Duke, since political science is not at the service of nation/state ideologies. The history you learn is different because you know you are members of a community more

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<sup>6</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, "Should War be Eliminated?" in John Berkham and Michael Cartwright, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 420.

determinative than the power called the United States of America. You learned to distrust abstract claims about objectivity because you are part of the people of the Second Chance that learned long ago that such claims are used to silence the voices of dissent.<sup>7</sup>

Hauerwas' vision of the nation-state is now obsolete; we live in a market state, not a nation state. More importantly, his reductionist and simplistic descriptions of war are so obviously false that they undercut his claim to possess an exclusively privileged access to the truth about war through the church. Hauerwas does not, moreover, provide a persuasive account of where to locate the true church that delivers such coveted goods. He has difficulty in coming to terms with the reality of the terrorism of the IRA. Thus, he is perfectly happy to allow the IRA's self-description of its activity as war rather than terrorism. "War is relative to each people's history. We thus often seek to deny to the other side the right to describe their violence as war. For example, barbarians cannot be warriors since they do not fight in a civilized manner. A bombing in London by the IRA is terrorism, not war."<sup>8</sup>

What this really means is that terrorists can make up their own self-serving descriptions of their evil actions and get a free ride in the name of conceptual relativism. Hauerwas is clearly incapable in this instance of distinguishing between truth and propaganda. What his particular observations reveal is not that theologians of his school have privileged access to the truth, but that their judgments are subject to intellectual corruption. At this level, it is often not the pious insider but the perceptive outsider who can help us know what is at stake. To put this theologically, we might say that the truth is often more visible through common grace than through special grace; there are weeds as well as tares in the truth claims of any church.

**3. The Just War Option.** We are, at least initially, given help on relevant political choices when we turn to the option of the just war theory. The central motivation driving the just war theory as we have received it from Augustine, Ambrose, and Aquinas is this: love of our neighbors requires that we protect them when they are assaulted by violent evil. Love is not just a matter of refraining from violence but of doing all we

<sup>7</sup>"Why Truthfulness Requires Forgiveness," *The Hauerwas Reader*, 315.

<sup>8</sup>*The Hauerwas Reader*, 420, fn. 43.

can to help our neighbors. It is one thing to refuse to engage in violence when we ourselves are attacked; it is another to refuse to use violence to protect other people who are unjustly attacked. Standing aside and letting others kill innocent civilians is refusing to take responsibility for helping other people. So we should be prepared to do all we can, up to and including using lethal force to stop terrorists from killing innocent people.

Again, it is useful to sort out the crucial issues at stake by means of a distinction. On the one hand, there is a maximalist version of the just war tradition. In this case, proponents work from a network of tough criteria, which, if satisfied, underwrite the morally positive justification of the use of lethal force. On the other hand, there is a minimalist version of the just war tradition. In this case, proponents reject the drive for a network of tough criteria, preferring instead to rely on informed judgment, and they reject the whole notion of a positive moral justification for the lethal use of force in all circumstances. War is seen as the least evil option available to us.

A hallmark of the maximalist version is the drive to codify the criteria governing the use of lethal force. The crucial elements involved in just war as applied to terrorism can be easily catalogued. (1) The war on terrorism must repair or prevent some grave wrong, e.g., restore rights wrongly done or reestablish a more just political order. (2) The war on terrorism must be declared by the legitimate authority, say, by president, congress, or parliament. (3) Government must declare the aims of the war on terrorism, e.g., destroy Al Qaeda, remove the Taliban, and work for a better Afghanistan. (4) The war on terrorism must be engaged in as a last resort, e.g., after negotiation fails, or if negotiation simply will not work. (5) In a just war on terrorism there must be a reasonable chance of success.

(6) There must be proportionality, that is, we should not resort to war on terrorism if the consequences would likely be worse than not doing so. Strenuous efforts to prevent negative, likely consequences need to be made. (7) There must be a right intention. Hatred and revenge are not appropriate; there must be a real intention to get rid of terrorism and to restore genuine peace. (8) Just means must be used in carrying out the war on terrorism. Hence we must distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, aim at military targets, and keep destruction proportionate to the achievable just ends in view. While I admire the idealism at work in the maximalist position, it fails by setting in place dubious opera-



tional and moral straightjackets that may aid good judgment if used flexibly but undercut it if deployed as an absolute code.

The language of war on terrorism may be central to masking one of the crucial problems we face at this point. Just as there was merit in speaking of a Cold War in the twentieth century, there is merit in speaking metaphorically of a War on Terrorism in the twenty-first. The metaphor of a war on terrorism draws attention to the fact that we are not dealing with mere politics, that we are facing the use of lethal force, that crucial national interests are at stake, and that conventional civilian defenses (like responding to terrorists as mere criminals) are inadequate to deal with the enemy. However, there cannot literally be a war on terrorism, for terrorism is simply one tactic in a network of tactics deployed to gain political ends. Thus, a critical assumption that we need to have in place in order to apply a strong version of just war theory is missing. There is no conventional enemy, complete with a state and a conventional army; and there is often no standard declaration of war. In addition, it is often impossible to determine a reasonable chance of success and to work out a just sense of proportionality by way of response.

We can, of course, insist that it is enough if we can apply most of the criteria of just war theory, even if we have to apply them in a rather relaxed manner. This is in keeping with the historical development behind the whole just war debate. The list of criteria I cited is, in fact, the final stage of a process of codification that has gone on over centuries. The move to codify is a later development; it is an effort to formalize our best informal judgments. So we should not worry too much if there is slippage here or there in the application of old insights to a new situation. The overall aim is to set limits to the use of lethal force and thus to come away in the end with a good conscience, that is, with a sense that we have engaged in a just rather than unjust war. We want to be able to say with a straight face that we have been morally just in our use of lethal force.

By now the maximalist position is clearly coming under severe strain. We have accepted that one crucial condition for the very application of just war theory is missing (there is no war); we have conceded that crucial conditions of application have been abandoned (chances of success and proportionality); and we have reinterpreted the history of the tradition of just war as the development of a critical insight (rather than a code of conduct). All that is left is the claim that we are still acting justly. In reality, we are knocking on the door of the minimalist version of just

war theory. I think that dealing appropriately with terrorism requires us to walk through that door without apology.

What is critically at stake in responding to terrorism is that we be justified in what we do rather than that we be just in what we do; it would be wonderful to be just, of course, but justice is not always possible. It is this insight (that we be justified in what we do) that lies at the base of the just war tradition. The aim is both to set limits to the use of lethal force and to foster a robust debate across the board in political and military circles about where those limits are. Put differently, the goal is not to give up on justice, but to recognize that there are circumstances when the ideal of justice is impossible; thus we have to work on what is the least of the evil options available to us and to argue our judgments in the public domain. The move to codify best practices in this arena is a worthy one, but it is never final, and we should be wary of assigning positive moral worth to our actions even when we satisfy our best formal criteria. As P. T. Forsyth insisted: "It is not urged that war may be made in order to do good but to prevent the prevention of good, to resist wrong, and especially wrong to those who cannot resist for themselves."<sup>9</sup>

It is important to understand what is at stake in this minimalist version of the just war tradition as applied here to terrorism. There is no claim that what we do represents an effort to establish the kingdom of God on earth. There is no hint of claiming divine sanction, or of any direct appeal to divine revelation. There is no effort to claim any kind of high moral ground. What is at stake is the goal of protecting the innocent, of restraining evil, and of doing so in a manner that may indeed be morally permissible but is likely to be shot through with tragedy, moral dissonance, and even a bad conscience. Yet there is equally no pulling back from using the best practices of dispute resolution; there is no abandoning of relevant (though contested and changing) rules of military engagement; there is no distribution of blank moral checks to be filled in at will; there is no setting up of the state action as criterion of moral action; there is no withdrawal into a private world of secrecy disconnected from public evaluation; and there is no reduction of moral and political reason to mere technical reason. In short, there is no move to cut military and political action loose from morality and letting it swing loose

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<sup>9</sup>P. T. Forsyth, *The Christian Ethic of War* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916), 87.

from ethical and theological evaluation. The underlying assumptions are these: the world is shot through with evil and sin; people deliberately and systematically reject the full resources of grace in their private and public lives; the default position in human life is war not peace (it is conflict not harmony); and the contingencies these assumptions entail must be taken radically and most seriously.

## Conclusion

In dealing with terrorism, we live on the edge of a moral apocalypse. In order to respond to it, some of those responsible for the welfare of others may land in places where our standard moral markers have been destroyed. In such a circumstance, the only moral compass that may remain is the mandate to do the least bad thing in the circumstances. The best moves we can make by way of the justification of our actions is that we do the least evil we can, given all the options available. We can engage in justified action, but the depth of evil that we face has obliterated the option of just action or just war.

As a footnote to this, I want to make clear that casting the issue in terms of Empire and Imperialism is empirically misleading. Current talk about the USA as empire is simply off base. For one thing, the new Empire has no theological clothes. It exists in the eye of its beholders as a mixture of theology, economic theory, and secular-political philosophy that cannot be said to be a state-imposed theology in any serious sense of that term. We can say the same about the ideology of the nation-state. The nation state as we have had it in the USA simply does not have a theology; the very use of the language of secular ideology and idols shows the bankruptcy of any theological description of the nation state as we have known it. Our politicians, whatever they may say, are pretty much forced to be functional atheists. However, there is something more deeply wrong in these analyses. Both options are simply obsolete; we live neither in a New Empire nor in a nation-state; these are false descriptions of the world we actually inhabit.

The state in the West has itself changed dramatically in the last generation. It has moved from a nation state to become a market state.<sup>10</sup> Nation states can control their boundaries, their economies, their cultures,

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<sup>10</sup>Philip Bobbitt's *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) provides a fine account of this development.

and their security; they seek to provide in varying degrees health care, education, and old-age security. A cocktail of changes in communications, technology, the failure of socialism, and globalization have undermined the nation state. In their place we have market states. Market states concentrate on maximizing opportunity. They balance public and private means of delivering public goods; and they look to the marketplace and its practices as a criterion of success in what they do. This is true of Moscow, London, Tokyo, Brussels, Berlin, Dublin, Seoul, and the like. Politics and religion reflect the background music of the market state. So we have market churches, market preachers, and market research-driven politicians. Even philanthropy is now administered on the model of market practices. We can rave and rant all we want about this, but this is where we now live. It will take time for the new religious, political, legal, and military dust to settle; it is not surprising that we feel blinded and disoriented.

# **GRACE UNDER PRESSURE: WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN THE CHURCH**

by

**Joerg Rieger**

Christianity is not primarily about religion or morality. It is about what I have called “grace under pressure.”<sup>1</sup> Within Christianity, the Methodist traditions have embodied this insight in powerful ways, although it has often been neglected and gone unrecognized. At the heart of these traditions lies the insight that God’s grace is more authentically experienced in the midst of the pressures of life than on the mountaintops. Today, this insight is shared by many people around the globe, especially those who struggle for liberation and survival. Without this insight, Christianity is prone to miss the reality of grace and the ability to see the real difference that God makes in the world. This is not just a problem for Methodism; it is one of the core problems of mainline Christianity today.

## **Matters of Life and Death**

When mainline Christians consider the pressures of life, they often mistake them for individual and isolated incidences that are of no consequence in the long run. They don’t recognize how these pressures contribute to the bigger picture. Yet many of the pressures of our time are so stark that they have become matters of life or death. More and more lives are ruined and lost, for instance, in the midst of economic struggles, which are reflected not only in the growing gap between the richest and

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<sup>1</sup>Joerg Rieger, *Grace under Pressure: Negotiating the Heart of the Wesleyan Traditions* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2011).

the poorest, but which increasingly extend also to those who consider themselves to be middle class.

Lives are destroyed, too, in the midst of asymmetries of power in both personal and global relationships. Domestic abuse at home, abuses of power in the workplace and in international relations—all have taken on epidemic proportions. Tensions along the lines of class, gender, and sexuality, as well as tensions along the lines of race and ethnicity also have taken on the urgency of life-and-death matters. These matters ultimately affect us all, whoever and wherever we are. Furthermore, they are genuine matters of faith. Dealing with them is the challenge at the very heart of Christianity. It is what makes the church the church.

God's grace comes alive in powerful ways in the midst of such pressures. In fact, it is most active under pressure. That is perhaps one of Christianity's most powerful insights. It has taken on shape at various points throughout Christian history; yet it seems that the Methodist movements have experienced this irrepressible grace in especially powerful ways. As a result, the Methodist traditions can provide deeper insights into how grace works under pressure, not just for their own benefit but also for the benefit of Christianity and of the world as a whole.

These insights need to be tested and applied in the context of the following question: How does grace under pressure challenge and transform the pressures of our times, lead us beyond the self-centeredness of much church life, and produce new hope for both church and world? Or, in simpler terms: What difference, if any, does Christianity make in the midst of the real pressures of life? This question haunts more and more of us every day.

### **Religious Self-Centeredness**

For the most part, religion appears to be still going strong in the United States. Nevertheless, there is a crisis looming on the horizon that has to do with a pervasive self-centeredness that only occasionally is interrupted by churches' efforts at what is called "outreach." Most of church life tends to focus time and attention on internal church matters. One harmful result is a gradual loss of faith, as faith shrivels when it becomes self-centered and self-referential. Another result is the loss of some of the most faithful church members. Many are beginning to sense that the church is playing what amounts to pious sandbox games.

What is perhaps most impressive about the early Methodist traditions is that, especially early, religion occasionally managed to break out of the self-centeredness of its own time. Then and now, breaking out of religious self-centeredness is based on a twofold challenge: how do we deal with our neighbors and how do we deal with God? Self-centered religion fails on each of these counts; John Wesley kept wrestling with both issues throughout his life. For the sake of providing a clear contrast regarding the relation to our neighbors, compare the common take on poverty with Wesley's view on poverty. Based on the "American Dream" that anyone can climb the ladder of success, many Christians in the United States today assume that poverty has to do with the personal failure of people who are poor. Blaming the poor has become the default mode even in the churches.

Wesley encountered similar self-centered attitudes in his own time, but he proposed a different perspective and a new relation to the poor. He pointed out that poverty was closely related to the behavior of the rich and to structural economic matters that favored the wealthy.<sup>2</sup> At first sight, this matter might appear to be a minor issue for Christianity. Yet the heart of the Christian faith is negotiated to a large degree by how we relate to our neighbors, and these relations become most visible when we look at how we relate to those of our neighbors who have been pushed to the margins. Religious narcissism can be challenged only when we begin to relate to others in new ways and begin to see the world from their perspective, rather than from our own.

The second question has to do with how we approach God. The way we relate to other people mirrors the way we relate to God. Self-centered religion that views other people in its own terms is likely to view the divine in its terms as well. As a result, both others and the divine other are shaped in the dominant image. This problem is quite widespread: God is commonly defined in terms of those whom we consider to be powerful and successful. And even those who would assert "God is everywhere" need to ask themselves: where do you really look for God in times of great pressure and need? The default position, it seems, is to look for God

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<sup>2</sup>In his "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions" of 1772, John Wesley talks about various causes of poverty, including the monopolizing of farms by the "gentlemen-farmers" and the luxury of the wealthy. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprinted Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 11:56–57.

at the top. This is a constant temptation, and it appears to have been a problem in the Methodist movements as well.

### Top-Down Religion

What went wrong at times in the Methodist movement itself, it might be argued, is that, despite genuine and fresh encounters with God and neighbors, self-centeredness reemerged because of a failure to clarify the character of God. John Wesley's surprising claim that "religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be of men"<sup>3</sup> points us in a new direction, toward a fresh understanding of the character of God. Not surprisingly, top-down religion goes hand-in-glove with top-down images of God. The alternative—religion that moves from the bottom up—requires bottom-up images of God. The good news is that we do not have to start from scratch in arguing our case: the Christian traditions are full of divine images that move from the bottom up. The ministry of Jesus is especially clear about this, but so is the theology of the apostle Paul.

The classical confession of Jesus as Lord, for instance, implied a radical break with the Roman Empire and initiated a different flow of power. Whereas the Roman Emperor led from the top down, Jesus led from the bottom up. "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6–7). This passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians sums up Jesus' ministry and his constant reminder that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. In line with Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, Paul thus proclaims "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23–24). This is reflected in the calling of the Christians, since "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are" (vv. 27–28).

The challenge, therefore, is this: How can we make sure that Christianity is reconnected to the all-transforming power of God, rather than the powers that be? What is at stake here, to be sure, is not a minor improve-

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<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, *Journal*, 25 May 1764, in *Works* (Jackson), 21:466.



ment of Christianity. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of the church itself.

### **Reshaping the Church From the Bottom Up**

In the midst of the empire of his own day, moving from the greatest to the least, from the British Empire to the colonies and from the emerging captains of industry to the factory floors, Wesley identified a source of power that reshaped his theology and his ministry, and that is reflected in his notion of grace. Meeting God at the bottom, with those at the margins and under pressure, can result in revitalizing and reforming the church.

The most important places where we find God at work, as identified in the Methodist traditions following John Wesley, are the means of grace. Means of grace are channels through which we receive God's grace, or links through which we are connected to God and that help us sustain our relationship. Initially, Wesley identified prayer, reading the Bible, and Holy Communion as the means of grace, and then added Christian conference and fasting. The older Wesley, summing up one of the most distinct contributions of Methodism to Christianity, also put strong emphasis on the works of mercy as means of grace.<sup>4</sup> Each of these provides an opportunity for revitalizing the Christian life in the context of listening to God and to other people. Following are five concrete steps that, in one way or another, need to be part of the formation of a church in touch with what really matters.

**Prayer.** In this line-up, praying does not mean presenting God with a wish list or performing a religious ritual. Prayer is about being in dialogue with God, which means speaking as well as listening. Praying means opening up to alternative experiences of God in the midst of the pressures of life, aligning our purposes with God's purposes when the going gets tough. Jesus himself set the example in Gethsemane, aware of his pending arrest: "Not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). Praying is not only a personal matter, as Wesley was well aware; it also takes place in community. And community, in the Methodist traditions, always includes the "least of these," so that the dialogue with God is necessarily extended to include others who are pushed to the margins and

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<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 1:381. John Wesley, "On Zeal," in *The Bicentennial Edition*, 3:313.

experience the deepest pressures of life. If our experience of listening is not intensified in this way, we may find it impossible to listen to the divine and the church ceases to be the church.

**Reading Scripture.** Reading the Bible also implies listening and a dialogue. Not only do we read the Bible, the Bible also “reads us”—an insight that was one of the genuine contributions of Latin American liberation theology.<sup>5</sup> We are shaped in this interaction in ways that we cannot anticipate and that lead us beyond our common confinement to the stereotypical “religious” or “ecclesial” realms into interaction with all of God’s creation. Like prayer, the Bible has its place not only in personal life but also in the community. Written by a large number of highly diverse people and groups, who all have encountered God in their lives, the Bible cannot be understood in its full depth without being read in communities diverse enough to capture the most severe pressures of life today, and that have experienced diverse encounters with God in those situations. That the unity of the biblical canon has always been a unity in diversity is often overlooked, but it holds a major lesson for the church.

**Holy Communion.** Everything comes together in the celebration of Holy Communion. Here the Bible is read, prayer and the liturgy (representing the broad traditions of the church) find their deepest roots, a community of diverse members gathers, and Christ’s presence is encountered in ways that have the potential to revitalize and at times revolutionize our theological and doctrinal images. The “open Table” of the Methodist tradition, inviting all who repent of their sin and want to live in peace with one another, breaks open our always too narrow images of community and extends our horizons. The community gathered around the Table in the Methodist tradition includes not only those who are official members of the church but also all who are aware of their shortcomings and seek to find new sources of life—particularly those at the margins of society who struggle along these lines but whom we often fail to take seriously as brothers and sisters because they do not fit our ecclesial profile. Such an open Table is more than a Methodist quirk. It reminds us of the fact that, unless the church as a whole manages to respect and to relate to others

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<sup>5</sup>See Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis; Melbourne, Australia: Dove, 1984), 34. This reflects the experience of the Christian Base Communities in Latin America.

whom we see, we stand little chance of respecting and relating to the Other whom we cannot see (1 John 4:20).

**Christian Conference.** In this context, Wesley's notion of "Christian conference" reminds us that we need to develop new forms of listening in community settings. The community is not a straightjacket where everybody is expected to think alike—demanding conformity is a pervasive problem of community formation. Instead, it is a place that creates space for discourses "seasoned with salt," as Wesley put it.<sup>6</sup> Wesley's questioning of conventional top-down leadership models well the challenges of such a discourse, which demands determination rather than conformity.<sup>7</sup>

**Fasting.** Fasting, in this context, might help resist the increasing commodification of life in the twenty-first century, where everything is put up for quick consumption. Fasting might teach us that listening cannot be a mode of consumption, like watching a show on TV or picking up the latest gossip. For the church, listening has nothing to do with a voyeuristic attitude, but with opening up to the challenges of life and participating in efforts to address them in community settings.

**Works of Mercy.** The so-called "works of mercy" provide the all-important challenge in this list and take us back through each of the others. While works of mercy are usually identified not with an attitude of listening but with "outreach"—with being proactive and doing things for others—all of that changes radically if we follow Wesley's lead and consider the works of mercy as means of grace. In this light, working together *with* (not *for*) people under pressure and at the margins provides prime opportunities for listening. More specifically, in this context, our whole way of listening is reshaped, as we begin to listen to people and matters that we had never noticed before and begin to understand what is worth listening to and what is not. Encountering God in this context, at the margins rather than at the top, opens us to the challenge of encountering alternative images of God in prayer, Bible, and Holy Communion.

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<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and others, from the year 1744 to 1789," in *Works* (Jackson), 8:377.

<sup>7</sup>It is well known that Wesley's own leadership style showed authoritarian tendencies. However, Wesley's leadership was not driven by the concerns of the wealthy and the powerful—and taking a stance with the marginalized always demands determination.

Here lies the most important and urgent lesson for the present, since the self-centeredness of the church impedes our ability to listen in meaningful ways to anything and anybody who is different from us. If Wesley was concerned that people who were not aware of the works of mercy as means of grace would fall from grace,<sup>8</sup> then this means we cannot be the church without listening to others. The church stands or falls with this issue. The only way for the church to be truly the church is to keep its ears to the ground of the deepest pressures of everyday life, to wait for God there, and then to act decisively together with God: grace under pressure. Here the church shows its true face, for all to see.

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<sup>8</sup>See John Wesley, "On Visiting the Sick," in *The Bicentennial Edition*, 3:385.

# **DECOUPLING EVANGELISM AND COERCION: EARLY METHODISM FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MISSION**

**by**

**Jack Jackson**

In response to a recent “Jesus Awareness Week” at the University of Nebraska, one student posted the following critique in an online forum:

Today we had a Christian rapper. . . . Aren’t there laws against these things? I wonder if they’d let me do a Satan awareness week, or possibly a reason awareness week. . . . It’s gonna suck hardcore . . . I should tell them to piss off as I walk by on my way to class. In case you are wondering, I do find this offensive. Does anybody else have crap like this going on at your school?<sup>1</sup>

Evangelism has rarely been a popular concept outside the Christian church, and sometimes not even within it. Increasing awareness of the world’s plural religious nature has led to additional challenges to the appropriateness of Christian evangelism, especially in light of the historical coupling between empire and the Christian tradition in the West.

Evangelism is often critiqued as focusing on conversion as its end and the willingness of some Christians to use manipulative means to elicit the repentance and faith of others. Many Wesleyan scholars, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup>“So It’s Jesus Awareness Week at My College,” 24 March 2008, <http://www.pbncation.com/showthread.php?t=2614637>, Accessed 5 September 2009.

have focused their work in helpful ways by broadening the nature of evangelism beyond verbal proclamation alone to include important aspects of initiation and embodiment, arguing that verbal proclamation of the gospel alone is a truncated understanding of evangelism. Even so, concerns over manipulation and coercion remain.

This paper offers two insights from early Methodism that help inform a contemporary practice of evangelism that retains verbal proclamation of the gospel as evangelism's defining characteristic, while at the same time decoupling it from coercive and manipulative practices. I propose that early British Methodism, and John Wesley specifically, understood a three-fold telos to the verbal proclamation of the gospel, namely (1) awakening, (2) repentance and faith leading to conversion, and (3) love of God and people leading to sanctification. After a brief discussion of contemporary critiques of evangelism and coercion, I provide a short overview of contemporary Wesleyan visions of evangelism. I then discuss the place of verbal proclamation of the gospel in early Methodism and its three-fold response. Finally, I propose that early Methodists understood the Holy Spirit to be the primary actor in eliciting a response to an evangelist's proclamation, not evangelists themselves.

These characteristics of early Methodist thought and practice help identify early Methodism as both distinctly evangelistic and remarkably free of manipulative or coercive activity. The result, I argue, is a fresh understanding of the evangelistic task that decouples evangelism from manipulative and coercive activities. Central to this effort is understanding that the ends of evangelism have been truncated to conversion alone in much of the contemporary thought and practice around evangelism. I seek to "decouple" evangelism and empire in contemporary and future settings.

### **Evangelism and Coercion Critiqued**

As a prelude, it is important to point out that the vast majority of Wesleyan scholars critique any association between coercion and evangelism as inauthentic to the Christian and Wesleyan traditions. Much of church history is characterized by individuals driven by peaceful and loving means to share the good news of God's love for the world.<sup>2</sup> Most fol-

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<sup>2</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, 2006), 44. Wright argues that the vast majority of Christian missionaries operated out of poverty and powerlessness and were not instruments of imperialist governments.

lowers of Christ understood that the way of Christ is inherently one of peace and that authentic sharing of the good news can only be done peacefully.

Unfortunately, Christian history contains notable exceptions when individuals, institutions, governments, and the church itself committed acts of manipulation, coercion, or even violence in order to motivate people toward conversion, or to punish them for not converting. The image of evangelism, therefore, for many both in and out of the church today, is one that is intimately linked with Western imperialism. The appropriate response of the church has been one of repentance, acknowledging that this association is often rooted in the church itself. Most scholars of evangelism, as a result, argue that authentic evangelism in contemporary settings must be decoupled from all manipulative and coercive practices.

David Bosch argues that evangelism aims at a response, but that it “should never deteriorate into coaxing, much less into threat.”<sup>3</sup> Rodney Clapp argues that evangelism cannot involve coercion, but is rather an honest attempt at persuasion that allows others to choose, as they will.<sup>4</sup> Kallenberg describes the tension the gospel produces and the human role in evangelism. He argues that people can only understand the gospel if it is offered in noncoercive ways.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the human task is to dialogue with people about the story of God in Christ and let the Spirit reveal the dissonance between the hearer’s life and the life of faith.<sup>6</sup>

This repudiation of coercion is also evident in the Wesleyan tradition. William Abraham argues, “. . . the gospel is not at our disposal to manipulate so that we can coax the modern person into believing.”<sup>7</sup> Abraham centers his understanding of the futility of manipulation in Wesley’s thought regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. He writes, “For Wesley, to be born again, to receive the witness of the Holy Spirit, to be justified, to be sanctified, and the like was to be subject to divine

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<sup>3</sup>David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 413.

<sup>4</sup>Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 171.

<sup>5</sup>Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 49.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>7</sup>William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 205.

action.”<sup>8</sup> God, Abraham argues, is the primary actor in evangelism, not the evangelist. Klaiber and Truesdale also are very straightforward about not using coercion and manipulation in evangelism.<sup>9</sup>

David Watson and William Cannon argue that the Wesleyan understanding of the means by which evangelism takes place is an “offering”<sup>10</sup> of salvation, even though the gospel will “confront”<sup>11</sup> some people very pointedly. The foundation for the church’s sharing of the good news of Christ with the world, especially as described within the Wesleyan tradition, is rooted in the centrality of God’s love for the world and the call for all people to mirror God’s love. But that call is never rooted in coercion and manipulation. These distort the very nature of the good news of Christ.

### **Contemporary Visions or Ends of Evangelism**

Much of the scholarship on evangelism in recent decades centers on the attempt to define it and provide a model of evangelistic thought and practice that decouples it from imperialistic and coercive practices that distort the gospel. Central to this effort, at least within Wesleyan circles, are moves to broaden the definition of evangelism beyond the act of verbal proclamation alone and the response of conversion. Yet the task has proven difficult and is still mutating.

Barrett describes the difficulty when he lists seventy-nine definitions of evangelism and explains the slow progress in coming to a consensus as due mainly to an almost chaotic confusion as to the meaning and scope of evangelism.<sup>12</sup> Abraham admits his inability to define evangelism and uses

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<sup>8</sup>William J. Abraham, “The Epistemology of Conversion: Is there Something New?,” in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon 2001), 184.

<sup>9</sup>Walter Klaiber, *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 204. Also Albert L. Truesdale and Keri Mitchell, *With Cords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2006), 166.

<sup>10</sup>David L. Watson, “A Praxis Approach to Evangelism: Reflections on the Realities of Contemporary Evangelical Outreach,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M.D. Meeks (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 160.

<sup>11</sup>William Ragsdale Cannon, *Evangelism in a Contemporary Context* (Nashville, TN: Tidings, 1974), 71.

<sup>12</sup>David B. Barrett, *Evangelize!: A Historical Survey of the Concept*, Global Evangelization Movement: The AD 2000 Series (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1987), 42-45, 49.



it as his most important motivation to “construe” an understanding of evangelism.<sup>13</sup> He identifies five conceptions that dominate the literature: proclamation, church growth, conversion, witness, and discipleship.<sup>14</sup> Concluding that ultimately none of these conceptions is satisfactory, he adds a sixth, which is initiation into the kingdom of God, a concept he later redefines as initiation into the church.

Some of these five conceptions are reflected in Mortimer Arias’ six “motivations,” which include eternal salvation, psychological salvation, church growth, discipleship, end times, and human liberation.<sup>15</sup> Scott Jones takes a slightly different direction that centers on initiation into discipleship. Stephen Chapman and Laceye Warner propose that evangelism is more an act of living in the image of God than verbal proclamation.<sup>16</sup> Bryan Stone centers evangelism in the life of the church, arguing that the church is integral to authentic Christian evangelism.<sup>17</sup>

These “visions” of evangelism often are developed as a counterweight to a “conversion only” understanding of evangelism, which remains a strong current in Wesleyan understandings of evangelism. Alan Walker, for instance, argues that evangelistic preaching calls for an immediate and definitive response to the gospel in conversion.<sup>18</sup> Eddie Fox and George Morris share his sentiment, arguing that the role and purpose of evangelism is to elicit a response of faith and repentance at every evangelistic opportunity.<sup>19</sup> Willimon agrees, arguing that conversion is the normative response to evangelism that announces the gospel.<sup>20</sup> Robert

<sup>13</sup>Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 7.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 93-4.

<sup>15</sup>Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984), xii.

<sup>16</sup>Stephen B. Chapman and Laceye C. Warner, “Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (2008): 60-2.

<sup>17</sup>Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007), 15.

<sup>18</sup>Alan Walker, *Standing up to Preach: The Art of Evangelical Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1983), 8.

<sup>19</sup>H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris, *Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So!: Expressing your Faith through Witnessing* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 70.

<sup>20</sup>William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 57.

also understands the goal of evangelism to be “calling individuals into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

Others, however, have hinted at a broader end to the evangelistic task that is uniquely Wesleyan in understanding. Kalas describes an end to the evangelistic task that goes well beyond conversion alone:

When true to its heritage, Methodist evangelism has never been a quick fix, just a sign-on-the-dotted-line agreement. Methodism has always been committed to “a long obedience in the same direction.” To be born again is not the end, but the beginning; the end is to be Christ like. Methodism is in the business of producing saints. Many may not have looked like a finished product, but they will settle for nothing less than a truly holy life.<sup>22</sup>

Others, including Albert Outler, have indicated that evangelism is more than conversion alone, and that sanctification is another critical response, that when lost, distorts the very nature of Christian witness.<sup>23</sup> The result is a spectrum of visions for evangelism both in regard to its nature and ends, that is often confusing, and which has yet to truly distance evangelism from coercion. As one person recently told me, “I don’t think Christian seminaries need professors of evangelism in our more ‘aware’ world.” With this in mind, the discussion now turns to two insights from early Methodism that provide hope for decoupling evangelism and coercion in contemporary thought and practice.

### **The Ends of Evangelism in Early British Methodism**

Early Methodism offers a unique vision of the ends of evangelism that offers hope for decoupling evangelism and coercion. As has been noted in numerous places, the word “evangelism” is seemingly never used by John Wesley, and he only refers to preachers as “evangelists” on a few of occasions.<sup>24</sup> Wesley also seems to specifically differentiate the

<sup>21</sup>Dana Lee Robert, W. Stephen Gunter, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Evangelism as the Heart of Mission*, Mission evangelism series; no. 1 (New York, NY: General Board of Global Ministries, 1997), 3.

<sup>22</sup>J. Ellsworth Kalas, “Evangelistic Ministry,” *The Asbury Herald* 117, no. 1 (2007): 5.

<sup>23</sup>Albert Cook Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 43.

<sup>24</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), “Letter to Mr. John Smith,” 12:90.

tasks of evangelists and pastors in the New Testament, seeing the evangelist's task as similar to the Apostles' of proclaiming glad tidings to the world.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Wesley clearly understood the church's responsibility to tell the Christian story.<sup>26</sup> The importance of verbal proclamation is a theme that runs throughout his life and ministry.

Although the nature of evangelism in early Methodism can be debated, as its nature is debated in contemporary contexts, early Methodism clearly places a high priority on the verbal proclamation of the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel occurred primarily through preaching, exhortation, teaching, and worship, but certainly in other ways as well. Furthermore, proclamation took place in four primary contexts of ministry, namely, field preaching, society meetings, class meetings, and one-on-one visitation. The result was a pattern of verbal proclamation of the gospel that facilitated spiritual development through key phases of discipleship that served to collect and preserve Methodists as disciples of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Pertinent to this discussion is that the end of verbal proclamation of the gospel in early Methodism is not any single one of the primary "visions" of evangelism as understood in contemporary contexts. Rather, the early Methodists hoped for one of three "ends" of evangelism. The first was awakening, then conversion through repentance and faith, and finally ever deeper love for God and neighbor, namely the process of sanctification.

**1. Awakening.** The first end of verbal proclamation of the gospel, and in Wesley's mind "the greatest charity," is to assist people in awakening from sin.<sup>28</sup> Wesley's description of people before they awaken is:

. . . the state of a natural man . . . his soul is in a deep sleep: His spiritual senses are not awake: They discern neither spiritual good nor evil . . . having no inlets for the knowledge of spiritual things, all the avenues of his soul being shut up, he is

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., "Sermon 115: The Ministerial Office," 7:118.

<sup>26</sup>James C. Logan, "Offering Christ: Wesleyan Evangelism Today," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1998), 118.

<sup>27</sup>Jack Jackson, "Collecting and Preserving Disciples: Verbal Proclamation in Early Methodist Evangelism," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 2(2010): 64-66.

<sup>28</sup>Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, "Journal entry 14 January 1750," 2:171.

in gross, stupid ignorance of whatever he is most concerned to know. He is utterly ignorant of God, knowing nothing concerning him as he ought to know. He is totally a stranger to the law of God, as to its true, inward, spiritual meaning. He has no conception of that evangelical holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.<sup>29</sup>

Unawakened people are alive to the world, but dead to God.<sup>30</sup> Wesley argued that awakening happens best by the proclamation of the gospel, and specifically by preaching of the Law, but also Bible reading, and conversation with Christians. Proclaiming the Law awakens people to their dire state before God.<sup>31</sup> People recognize their sinfulness before God and their need for the gospel.

For Wesley, awakening is the first response to the gospel. His journals and early writings demonstrate that he is more concerned about the number of people awakened during field preaching than converted.<sup>32</sup> Field preaching was understood as the first point of contact with people, and the goal was to awaken people to their sinfulness before God and their need for the gospel. Awakening is the first fruit, the first response, to the gospel's proclamation in early Methodism.<sup>33</sup> Assisting people with this first step of response to the gospel is necessary; it is only after awakening that people can move towards a deeper response. The normative understanding of this response is indicated through its central place in the entire structure of Methodism, for it is awakening (the first response) not conversion (the second response) that is required for membership in a society or class. Only through this initial awakening is future maturity toward conversion through repentance and faith a possibility.

**2. Conversion.** Yet this maturity is also critical. After a Methodist is awakened, preachers are charged to "follow the blow" so that people might not fall asleep again, but experience conversion—the second end of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., "Sermon 9: The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," 5:99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., "Sermon 17: The Circumcision of the Heart," 5:202. See also "Sermon 3: Awake Thou that Sleepest," 5:25.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., "Thoughts Concerning Gospel Ministers," 10:455–456.

<sup>32</sup> William W. Dean, "Disciplined Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell Groups in British Methodism" (Thesis (Ph. D.), University of Iowa, 1985), 301.

<sup>33</sup> Phillip Meadows, "The Journey of Evangelism," in *Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009), 422.

verbal proclamation.<sup>34</sup> Wesley argues that stopping verbal proclamation of the gospel at awakening, and failing to invite people to deeper discipleship through repentance and faith, is like “begetting children for the murderer.”<sup>35</sup> Methodist preachers, class leaders, and laity were trained to question people about their spiritual state. Part of the inquiry, as Wesley explained it to his preachers, is to discover a person’s spiritual state “whether convinced or unconvinced, converted or unconverted. Tell him, if need be, what conversion is; and then renew and enforce the inquiry.”<sup>36</sup> If someone has not repented and believed the gospel, then a Methodist is to describe conversion and ask the person again if she has experienced it. Certainly contemporary thought on evangelism that places critical importance on the response of conversion in evangelism would resonate well with early Methodism.

Conversion in early Methodism plays a critical role in discipleship and cannot be underemphasized. But the Wesleyan understanding of conversion, as a critical second response to the verbal proclamation of the gospel, reveals a uniquely Wesleyan understanding of the process of discipleship. The first response to the evangelistic witness is not conversion, but awakening. Both are critical, but before true repentance and faith, thought Wesley, was a season of awakening. Only after this season, be it long or short, were people ready to repent and believe the gospel. The entire structure of early Methodism, from field preaching, to societies, to classes and one-on-one visitation, was built on this understanding that before repentance and faith came a period of awakening.<sup>37</sup> Yet it is also clear that early Methodists anticipated a third response to the gospel.

Early Methodism emphasizes a third and final response to the gospel, namely sanctification. Christian perfection is the final telos of response to the gospel and the essence of salvation. As Wesley wrote, salvation is broader than conversion alone and includes “holiness of heart and life.”<sup>38</sup> By salvation Wesley meant: “. . . not barely, according to the

<sup>34</sup>Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, “Journal entry 12 March 1743,” 1:416.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., “Journal entry 25 August 1763,” 3:144.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., “Minutes of Several Conversations,” 8:306.

<sup>37</sup>Jackson, “Collecting and Preserving Disciples: Verbal Proclamation in Early Methodist Evangelism,” 49-52.

<sup>38</sup>Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion Pt. 3,” 8:209.

vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God.”<sup>39</sup>

Salvation for Wesley includes present justification and sanctification.<sup>40</sup> Salvation in Wesleyan thought and practice is always much more than one’s eternal destiny; it is also the new life that results from growing deeper in God’s love.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, it is the proclamation of the gospel that helps draw persons towards this final response. As Wesley argued, only the gospel “is so happily suited to attain these ends [Christian perfection], so it is the only effectual means that God has appointed in the lips of his ministers for this purpose.”<sup>42</sup> Proclamation of the gospel facilitates awakening and conversion, but the final response to the verbal proclamation of the gospel is Christian perfection. In this way, verbal proclamation of the gospel must be seen as critical to the concept of evangelism (again, a term never used by Wesley) in early Methodism. Though evangelism may be more than verbal proclamation alone, evangelism is never less than verbal proclamation of the gospel.

These three responses to the verbal proclamation of the gospel are critical to the early Methodist understanding of discipleship and evangelism. Early Methodists operated under the assumption that many, if not most people are not converted the first time they hear the gospel. Rather, after hearing the gospel once or many times, people awaken to the good news of God’s love for the world and God’s call to be part of God’s work in the world through the community of faith. At some point after awakening and the continued hearing of the gospel, conversion is viewed as the next response necessary. After conversion, Christian perfection is understood to follow, sometimes quickly, sometimes after a period of time. But each of these three phases is seen as proper responses to the gospel. Certainly the ultimate hope is sanctification, but each is valid and necessary,

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion Pt. 1,” 8:47.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., “Sermon 43: The Scripture Way of Salvation,” 6:44.

<sup>41</sup>Henry H. Knight III, “The Means of Grace and the Promise of New Life in the Evangelism of John Wesley,” in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, eds. Stephen W. Gunter and Elaine A. Robinson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 136.

<sup>42</sup>Wesley, *The Arminian Magazine*, 20 (1797), 72.

depending on a person's phase of discipleship. This understanding informs current efforts to decouple evangelism and coercion in contemporary practice.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Early Methodist Proclamation**

Early Methodism informs current efforts to decouple evangelism and coercion in a second important way as well. Methodists believed that the Holy Spirit was the primary and responsible agent in helping people respond in the three ways described above. The Spirit is the one who truly presses and calls people to "spiritual stature and strength."<sup>43</sup> The Spirit "alone can quicken those Who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life, and so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace, as to bring their good desires to good effect. . . ."<sup>44</sup> The Holy Spirit is the primary actor in spiritual development.

That said, the Spirit tends to work through human agents. Early Methodists seem to understand the human task in evangelism as invitation, encouragement, and yes, even persuasion. Persuasion is evident in the Wesleyan concept of "pressing" where people partner with the Spirit to encourage hearers to respond as the Spirit leads them. Two typical examples of this concept are found in Wesley:

At two, I explained to an earnest congregation at Hensingham the "redemption that is in Jesus Christ;" and at five exhorted a large multitude at Whitehaven, with strong and pressing words, to examine whether they had sufficient grounds for calling either themselves or their neighbours Christians.<sup>45</sup>

About ten I preached at New-Mills, to as simple a people as those at Chapel. Perceiving they had suffered much by not having the doctrine of Perfection clearly explained, and strongly pressed upon them, I preached expressly on the head; and spoke to the same effect in meeting the society. The spirits of many greatly revived; and they are now "going on unto perfection." I found it needful to press the same thing at Stockport in the evening.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, "Sermon #107: On God's Vineyard," 7:205.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., "Sermon 17, The Circumcision of the Heart," 5:210-11.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., "Journal entry 1 October 1749," 2:161.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., "Journal entry 1 April 1782," 4:224.

Wesley argues, however, that the human task of pressing is really a reflection of the Holy Spirit's work: "At nine I preached to a much larger congregation, and the word was sharper than ever. Four or five could not bear it, but went away. Some would have gone away, but could not; for the hand of the Lord pressed them to the earth."<sup>47</sup> In this way, Wesley affirms that the human task is to proclaim, but that it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately enables response to the gospel and spiritual maturity.<sup>48</sup>

Evangelists are to press those who hear the gospel to obey as the Spirit leads. This pressing, though often pointed, is not manipulation or coercion, but persuasive encouragement. It may be strong at times, but the goal is not to get people to do something that the evangelist desires, but to encourage them to follow the Spirit's leading. Evangelism, therefore, becomes in part an act of spiritual direction, though it is a very focused task.<sup>49</sup> The human role is to encourage the listener to respond to this divine pressing; to point out the tension the Spirit raises between the listener's life and the call of the gospel, and encourage people to hear and obey the Spirit's call to respond. Early Methodists tended to believe that the Spirit was the primary agent of persuasion, not the evangelist. The Spirit presses hearers (and proclaimers alike) to respond based on their need to awaken, repent, or grow deeper in love. But the Spirit's persuasion is never manipulative. The Spirit works co-operantly with each person, necessitating every individual's responsible choice to follow as a disciple of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the Spirit in evangelism is often noted in contemporary scholarship. Outler offers perhaps the clearest description of the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism: "Evangelism is a joint operation of the Spirit and the evangelist at every step of the way—the Spirit moving in those who speak and in those who hear."<sup>51</sup> Bryan Stone rightly echoes this position: "Christian evangelism . . . is premised wholly upon the faithfulness of the Spirit's witness in our lives rather than our own ability

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., "Journal entry 4 July 1750," 2:199.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., "Journal entry 11 April 1764," 3:167.

<sup>49</sup>Meadows, "The Journey of Evangelism," 424-5.

<sup>50</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 147-51.

<sup>51</sup>Albert C. Outler, "Theory and Practice in Christian Evangelism: A Theologian's Comments on 'The Year of Enlistment,'" in *The Albert Outler Library: Evangelism*, ed. W. J. Abraham (Anderson, IN: Bristol, 1988), 21.



to calculate and predict how our obedience might translate into effectiveness.”<sup>52</sup> As Fox and Morris explain, the Spirit is the one who leads people to a response, and the response is not rightly manipulated.<sup>53</sup> But the link offered in this paper between the Spirit’s role and the three responses, identifies two important characteristics of noncoercive evangelism from early Methodism that are applicable in contemporary settings.

### **Decoupling Evangelism and Coercion**

The dangers of coupling evangelism and coercion are painfully evident from the linking of evangelism and empire in parts of Western church history. But early Methodism provides a theology and practice that decouples evangelism and coercive practices, and in turn provides a framework for critiquing future evangelistic practices that are associated with manipulation and coercion.

First, early Methodism insists that the gospel is verbally proclaimed. This proclamation elicits multiple acceptable responses, only one of which is repentance and faith leading to conversion. This conversion is critical, but no more so than an initial awakening and an ultimate sanctification through love of God and others. When the telos of evangelism is seen as three-fold, each one of which is critical in discipleship, accurately manipulating a certain response becomes much more difficult. If conversion is the only end, or even the primary end, then awakening and sanctification can be ignored, easing the process and importance of coercing or manipulating the response of conversion if thought necessary by the evangelist. The early Methodist’s understand three equally necessary responses at different stages of discipleship. These made manipulation and coercion of any one response both difficult and unnecessary. Manipulation is difficult because knowing if a person has previously truly come to a point of awakening or repentance and faith is a difficult or even impossible task. Coercion is unnecessary because Methodists believed the Holy Spirit is the primary encourager of each response.

Second, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in early Methodism provides a foundation in which response to the gospel is expected but never manipulated. The human task in early Methodism is to announce the gospel verbally, and then encourage people to respond to the Spirit. But it

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<sup>52</sup>Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 12.

<sup>53</sup>Fox and Morris, *Let the Redeemed*, 69.

is always the Spirit that provides the real encouragement and pressing. This removes the necessity for the evangelist to incorporate any sort of manipulative or coercive activity in order to encourage a certain response. The evangelist speaks and “presses” those who hear to respond to God’s call of love; but, because only the Spirit knows what is truly going on in a person’s heart, human efforts to manipulate a certain response, conversion or otherwise, potentially distort what the Spirit is trying to do.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I propose that the early Methodist understanding of a three-fold response to evangelistic proclamation of the gospel, along with the Methodist belief that the Spirit is the one who calls people towards deeper response to the gospel, offers fresh hope for decoupling evangelism and coercion in the contemporary thought and practice of evangelism. When conversion is seen as one of three appropriate responses to the gospel, then practices that limit evangelism to the response of conversion alone truncate evangelism and are deficient for Wesleyan theology and practice. Conversion, through repentance and faith, was critical to early Methodism, but not as an end in itself. Rather conversion functioned alongside awakening and sanctification in calling people to an ever-deeper love for God and neighbor. Furthermore, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the primary actor in encouraging human response to the gospel provides a framework for critiquing any evangelistic efforts that manipulate or coerce. Though empire and evangelism may always be seen as a tragic period in church history, the Wesleyan heritage provides a foundation for decoupling evangelism and coercion in contemporary and future practices of evangelism.

# **JESUS, ECUMENISM, AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS: A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE**

by

**Don Thorsen**

Interfaith relations are not new. In fact, one can argue that there have been interfaith relations for millennia, since they have to do with interaction between people from different faiths or religions. Of course, interfaith relations occur today, and one does not need to travel internationally in order to speak with people from different faith traditions. Your neighbor or someone with whom you work, for example, may be a Hindu, Buddhist, Jew, or Muslim. You may even be related, one way or another, with someone from another religious tradition. Of course, there is also the question of how to relate with those who resemble Christianity, for example, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, and others who do not fully orthodox Christianity. Last, there are those who do not easily fit into any of the previous categories, including Scientology and a myriad of New Age adherents.

## **Ecumenism and the Wesleyan Theological Society**

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Christians became explicitly involved with ecumenism, which intends to bring about unity among Christians, churches, denominations, and parachurch groups. Of course, unity occurs in many ways. It may involve the merging of churches. More often it involves doctrinal statements intended to bring believers together, or cooperation in ministry with other Christians. With regard to the latter, the National Council of Churches (NCC) and National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) have brought many together for the sake of joint

social and missions-oriented ministries. Of course, the formation of competing ecumenical organizations raises as many questions as answers about ecumenism.

Personally, I have long been involved in ecumenical work, mostly on behalf of the Wesleyan Theological Society (WTS), with the Commission on Faith and Order in the National Council of Churches. Recently, I began to participate in another NCC Commission on Interfaith Relations. As a formal discipline of study and ministry, Interfaith Relations is new to me, just as it is new by and large to the WTS. However, it complements both my ecumenical efforts and those of the Society. So I want to present and promote participation in interfaith relations, particularly in light of the Wesleyan and Holiness heritage of the WTS.

Although great care needs to occur in conducting interfaith relations, they are important for being, living, and ministering as Christians, especially in light of Wesley's regard and appreciation for people, including those of other faith traditions. Certainly Wesley did not have the same interfaith values that have been part of the ecumenical movement for the past century. However, his "catholic spirit," among other beliefs and values, challenge us to develop and apply better interfaith relations today.<sup>1</sup> I will present my concern for promoting interfaith relations from a Wesleyan perspective by examining the history of ecumenical involvement by the WTS as an example of Wesleyan and Holiness concern. I will also talk about different types of interfaith relations that Christians pursue, and then address both the benefits and liabilities of developing relationships with people who have widely divergent beliefs, values, and practices. My discussion will be more provocative than final in its presentation; I am still on a learning curve in interfaith relations. Nevertheless, I hope to encourage people, especially of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions of Christianity, to make interfaith relations more central to their theory and practice.

For almost three decades, representatives from the Wesleyan Theological Society have participated in the Commission on Faith and Order, which is one of the four commissions of the National Council of Churches (NCC). People like David Cubie, Paul Basset, and Donald Dayton were instrumental in representing the WTS to Faith and Order, and

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<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit" (1750, sermon 39), *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:92-95.

likewise representing Faith and Order and other ecumenical concerns to the Society. While Wesleyan and Holiness denominations supportive of the WTS have tended to participate more in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the Society responded to invitations to send representatives to Faith and Order. This participation was considered complementary rather than contradictory to ecumenism. After all, not all members of the WTS are members of historic Holiness denominations. For example, United Methodists represent a large constituency in the WTS, and their ecumenical involvements in the NCC are as important to the Society as are other involvements in the NAE.

Despite the historical and denominational precedents for representation of the WTS in Faith and Order, its participation has caused some confusion and consternation among members of the Society. No doubt the predominant participation of members from NAE-oriented denominations accounts for some of the concern. However, Faith and Order represents only one of the Commissions of the NCC. Another in which I have recently become involved is the Commission on Interfaith Relations. My involvement here came about, in part, due to my increased interest in ecumenism. Since 2003, I have served as a representative of the WTS to Faith and Order, along with Don Dayton. As I became more involved with leadership in the Commission, the opportunity arose for me to participate in Interfaith Relations.

To me, Interfaith Relations seems like an obvious and important next step in the development of my ecumenical involvements. Although ecumenism among Christians is crucial, there remains the important, albeit more problematic reality of other faith traditions and how to relate with them in ways that are healthy and biblical. Of course, my interest in Interfaith Relations rekindles early interest of mine in comparative religious studies—when I completed an undergraduate major in Religious Studies at Stanford University. Last, as an evangelically oriented Christian, it is also important to me to understand how best evangelism, church growth, and missions should take place without doing so in ways that are offensive, unjust, oppressive, or proselytizing of other faith communities.

### **The Importance of Interfaith Relations**

Historically speaking, some Christians have not wanted to relate (talk, communicate) with anyone other than themselves, that is, their particular socio-cultural, religious community. Other Christians greatly

desired to speak with people from other faith traditions, but did so with the intention of converting them to Christianity. Still other Christians not only wanted to speak with those from other faiths, but wanted to understand, appreciate, and possibly glean from them truths for their own expression of Christianity.

In my work with Interfaith Relations, I have become increasingly aware of a theological rationale for interfaith relations. In fact, the Commission on Interfaith Relations published a brochure that provides such a rationale. I do want to focus on what it says about Jesus as a role model for interfaith relations.<sup>2</sup>

When we look at Jesus, we find very helpful clues for developing beliefs, values and practices about how Christians may approach the prospect of interfaith relations. For example, Jesus talked about love for neighbors (e.g., Matt. 22:36-40). Love should include respecting others, listening to them, and treating them as we would want them to treat us (Matt. 7:12). There is also the ideal of hospitality to strangers or aliens. This notion goes back to the Old Testament, but Jesus also befriended those outside the usual boundaries of Judaism. For example, he dialoged at length with the Samaritan woman, and he praised the Good Samaritan in caring for those outside his own community (Luke 10:25-37). The Book of Hebrews reiterates the importance of showing hospitality to strangers; one cannot know the supernatural potential of one's interactions (Heb. 13:2).

Through Jesus, scripture says that people have the opportunity to be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:18ff; Col. 3:15ff). However, Christians have not always communicated that reconciliation in effective, loving ways. Consider the following:

Christians have been sent into the world to testify in word and deed to the God we know through Jesus (John 17:18). Yet Christians have not always embodied God's love in their relationship with people of other religious traditions. A lack of understanding and respect for other faiths has often resulted in fear, distrust, and the dehumanization of people in other religious traditions. Christian witness to God's love seeks to share

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<sup>2</sup>See "Getting to Know Neighbors of Other Faiths: A Theological Rationale for Interfaith Relations," National Council of Churches U.S.A., <[www.nccusa.org](http://www.nccusa.org)> accessed 11 February 2011. The remainder of this sections draws upon the rationale in the aforementioned brochure.

the gospel of Jesus with the world. That means conversing with, listening to, learning from, and living peacefully with those in the world who do not confess Jesus as Lord. Listening and sharing sometimes shows God's love better than declarations of beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus, we find a role model of peacemaking that has significant implications for dealing with people of other faiths collectively and individually. Our present world is filled with injustice, violence, and other social problems. Religions of the world should not contribute to these problems, but to correct them. Christians should be in the forefront of trying to bring about greater understanding, appreciation, and cooperation among people of differing faiths.

Of course, there are other biblical rationales for interfaith relations beyond those found in Jesus. First, all people are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). The common humanity and relatedness of people flourishes when all people are interrelated to one another as gifts from God. Second, the Holy Spirit of God is with people always, from the beginning (Gen. 1:2). God's Holy Spirit continues to be with us—individually and collectively, inside and outside Christianity—blowing where the Holy Spirit chooses (John 3:8). Third, all peoples—indeed, all nations—are to be blessed through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 18:17, 22:17-18). The blessing includes salvation through Jesus Christ, who is the offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-9). Fourth, care for the alien is a common theme throughout the Old Testament. Just as Israel once had been aliens, they are to care for the aliens (or strangers) in their presence (Ex. 19:34, 22:31; Deut. 10:19; Psalm 146:9). Fifth, if Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves, then love should include more than evangelizing them. Care of neighbor also includes getting to know them for who they are, dialoguing with them, and cooperating in areas of mutual concern (e.g., interfaith marriages, interfaith families, religious freedom, disinformation, injustice, persecution).

### **Types of Theologies of Other Religions**

One of the dilemmas in contemplating interfaith relations is the salvific status of people of other faiths or religions. Are they saved? Damned? Subject to some future limbo-type existence? Depending on

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

one's view of religions of the world, what should be the motivation for our relationships with them? Is it enough just to get to know them? Do we need to "save" them, or is it enough to treat them in a neighborly fashion?

There are several distinguishable ways that Christians have understood themselves, theologically speaking, in relationship to people of other religious traditions. Paul Knitter outlines four models of interfaith relations.<sup>4</sup> They are as follows:

1. **Replacement Model** ("Only One True Religion"): "In the final analysis, Christianity is meant to replace all other religions. . . . In the end—or, as soon as possible—God wants there to be only one religion, God's religion: Christianity. If the other religions have any value at all, it is only a provisional value."
2. **Fulfillment Model** ("The One Fulfills the Many"): "The model for a Christian theology of religions that we explore in this part represents a move from seeing Christianity as the 'replacement' to the 'fulfillment' of other religions. . . . They believe that other religions are of value, that God is to be found in them, that Christians need to dialogue with them and not just preach to them."
3. **Mutuality Model** ("Many True Religions Called to Dialogue"): "[T]he statement that Christianity is not the only true religion is 'good news.' . . . If the Fulfillment Model usually landed more heavily on the side of Jesus' particularity, in this Mutuality Model the greater weight will fall on the side of God's universal love and presence in other religions."
4. **Acceptance Model** ("Many True Religions: So Be It"): "What we are calling the Acceptance Model thinks it can do a better job at this balancing act. . . . It does so not by holding up the superiority of any one religion, nor by searching for that common something that makes them all valid, but by accepting the real diversity of all faiths."

The majority of Christians in church history have followed the first model—the Replacement Model. This is true of Wesleyan, Methodist, and other evangelically-oriented Christian traditions. Nowadays it may not be

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<sup>4</sup>Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 19, 63, 109, 173.



considered the most politically-correct way to view other religions, but it does justice to biblical teachings, if not also the majority of Christian views.

Some Christians may actually feel threatened by models two, three, and four. It is like the proverbial slippery-slope argument: Once you allow for some diversity of truth among religions of the world, then how can you prevent yourself from sliding into relativism and sacrifice Jesus' claim to represent "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)? This fear is especially pronounced in a world progressively thought of as post-modern. Postmodernism challenges the universality of all religious truth claims. But this fear need not prevent Christians from considering inter-faith relations. Jesus often asked people to do that which, humanly speaking, seems counterintuitive, yet reflects deeper spiritual realities.

Christians in the Wesleyan-Methodist-Holiness traditions need not feel insecure about the fact that, largely speaking, they reflect the Replacement Model. Indeed, Knitter says that even the World Council of Churches (WCC) affirms this model in its official statements. Although the WCC affirms interfaith dialog, it does not stray from historic Christianity. Knitter says:

Conversations between the Gospel and other religious paths may find points of similarity, but ultimately any similarities would give way to a more fundamental dissimilarity, or what was called discontinuity. Replacement, understood generally as total replacement, has the final word.<sup>5</sup>

In some WCC documents, members seem to be pushing beyond the borders of the Replacement Model to a hybrid of other models above. But nothing official has been changed.

Even from the perspective of the Replacement Model, increased dialog, understanding, appreciation, and support is achievable. Indeed, it is desirable in an increasingly small, yet inextricably connected world. For example, some evangelically oriented Christians reflective of Wesleyan and Holiness theology advocate a Partial Replacement Model of interfaith relations. Clark Pinnock, for one, advocated a more inclusive view of the relationship between Jesus and other religions. He emphasized the person

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 43. Knitter thinks the National Council of Churches advocates a Replacement Model, though individual members and denominations may advocate more progressive models.

and work of the Holy Spirit as universally present and active in the lives of everyone, Christian and non-Christian. Pinnock went so far as to say that “God’s boundless mercy is a primary truth that cannot be compromised.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Christians must “recognize that God can save outside of the visible boundaries of Christianity.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Exclusivism, Pluralism, and Inclusivism**

Other categories with which to think about the relationship between Christians and other faiths or religions are *exclusivism*, *pluralism*, and *inclusivism*. Basically speaking, exclusivism reflects the Replacement Model, arguing that no one is saved who does not name the name of Jesus (John 14:6; Romans 10:9-17). Second, pluralism is the view that all religions are equally valid, which represents a variation of universalism or universal salvation (1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Peter 3:9). It is debatable, of course, whether pluralism represents the Fulfillment Model, Mutuality Model, Acceptance Model, or all of the above. Third, inclusivism is generally understood to mean that people may be saved without explicit reference to Jesus or the church. Now, this may mean that their salvation is still guaranteed by the atonement of Jesus, but not necessarily. Inclusivism tends to affirm a range of positions between exclusivism and pluralism. Thus, inclusivism provides a great deal of liberty and, perhaps, elusiveness (mystery, paradox, or dialectic) in relating with people of other faiths or religions.

Several verses in the Bible suggest that people may be saved who never heard of Jesus, lived before the time of Jesus, or heard but did not understand the gospel message of salvation. Paul talks about those who are not given the law; he says that their conscience will either accuse or excuse them from judgment (Rom. 2:13-15). God does not want any to perish; God will not condemn people just because they were born at the wrong place or time (1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 22:2). It may be that God will, at some time, present the gospel to all people, even if it occurs after the present life, just as Jesus was reported to have made proclamation to those who had died during the time of Noah (1 Peter 3:18-19).

Historically, prominent Christians and Christian traditions have argued for the possibility that people may be saved in unexpected ways.

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<sup>6</sup>Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), quoted by Knitter, 47.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

For example, the Westminster Confession makes a distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of salvation. Thomas Oden references the Westminster Confession, which “cautiously stated that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the church (XXV.2), leaving extraordinary means to God.”<sup>8</sup> Stephen Merrill concurs: “No Orthodox can maintain that all outside the Church are damned. As a personal problem, the answer of the question must be left in the hands of Him ‘who desireth not the death of a sinner’ but wills ‘that all men be saved.’”<sup>9</sup>

In my experience of ecumenical and interfaith relations, people prefer to use the language of exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Indeed I prefer to use them as well; they seem simpler and less theologically problematic than Paul Knitter’s models. But Knitter challenges us to go deeper into our understanding of the precise relationship between Christians (and Christianity) and those of other faiths or religions. It may be that the categories of exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism are more serviceable—practically as well as conceptually—for Christians in general, and for advocates of ecumenism and interfaith relations in particular. But Knitter reminds us that, regardless of apparent differences, there continue to be striking similarities among the majority Christian groups in the world, regardless of whether their ministerial priorities favor interfaith dialogue or evangelism.

### A Wesleyan Perspective

Is there a distinctively Wesleyan perspective upon which we may draw for our understanding of Christianity and interfaith relations? United Methodists for long have given leadership in the broader Wesleyan tradition in favor of interfaith relations. In fact, following Pinnock’s line of argumentation, Doug Mills argues that the person and work of the Holy Spirit represents a powerful theological basis for interreligious dialog and cooperation. Mills served as the Associate General Secretary for Dialogues and Interfaith Relations for the United Methodist Church. Drawing

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas C. Oden references the Westminster Confession, which “cautiously stated that there is no *ordinary* possibility of salvation outside the church (XXV.2), leaving extraordinary means to God;” see *Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 328.

<sup>9</sup>Oden quotes Stephen Merrill: “No Orthodox can maintain that all outside the Church are damned. As a personal problem, the answer of the question must be left in the hands of Him ‘who desireth not the death of a sinner’ but wills ‘that all men be saved,’” *Life in the Spirit*, 328.

upon John Wesley as well as the history of Methodist ecumenism and interreligious concerns, Mills gave the following rationale for interfaith relationships:

This reference to the work of the Holy Spirit and grace is particularly important to the Wesleyan family because we have a unique theological emphasis to offer for the understanding of inter-religious dialogue. Because we understand John Wesley's insistence on prevenient grace, then we know that our task of witness (or evangelism) is not set in the context of a world lost and deprived of God. Our task is, instead, set in the context of a world in which God is very much active and where people have already experienced the love of God in good measure through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Because we understand prevenient grace that "goes before," we know that the activity of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the confines of the church. The Spirit of God is at work in the world, too, even at work in persons of other religious traditions. A large part of our task, and foundational to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, is to learn to discern the Spirit's work.<sup>10</sup>

Mills presents a Wesleyan perspective in support of interreligious dialog and cooperation. But what of John Wesley himself? Did he have anything in particular to say about interfaith relations?

I have long appealed to Wesley's sermon on "A Catholic Spirit" to promote ecumenism. However, the sermon does not specifically address interfaith relations. It has more to say about inter-Christian relations than interfaith relations. Wesley's spirit, though, is encouraging with regard to the prospect of dealing with increased diversity, pluralism, and so-called postmodern concerns in the world.

An intriguing investigation into Wesley's view of interfaith relations can be found in an article by Tony Richie entitled "Mr. Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam."<sup>11</sup> In response

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<sup>10</sup>Douglas Mills, "A Very Short Theological Basis for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation," paper, Commission on Interfaith Relations, New York, 21 February 2009.

<sup>11</sup>Tony Lee Richie, "Mr. Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam," *Asbury Theological Journal* 58:2 (Fall 2003), 79-99. Cf. Tony Richie's recently published book on this topic, entitled *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue* (Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2011).

to the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, Richie sought to find greater theological understanding of interfaith relations through a study of Wesley, especially with regard to what the latter had to say about Islam, or Mohametanism, as it was called in the eighteenth century. As might be expected, Wesley spoke of Islam in several ways: analytically, theologically, polemically, and finally, evangelistically. Some of his comments reflect the stereotypes of his era. Yet, Wesley said many constructive things with regard to the need to assess and interact fairly with adherents of Islam.

A constructive thing Wesley said relevant to interfaith relations was his outline of a “three-fold circle of providence.”<sup>12</sup> The three circles include an “outermost circle” of providence, which included Heathen, Muslims, and Jews. The “interior circle” of providence included the visible church, while the “inmost circle” included the invisible church, or all true Christians. God’s love is not confined to the inner circles; it extends to adherents of other faiths. Wesley expected that every person live up to the light they have, apparently optimistic about the possibility of the unevangelized responding positively to the general revelation of God, thus partaking of a measure of the salvific blessings of God. To be sure, Wesley was pessimistic about how assuredly people may be saved without the specific revelation of Jesus and scripture. His emphases on “prevenient grace” and “natural conscience,” which was more a gift of grace than human initiative, made Wesley hopeful about their salvation, though he would put no confidence in it. Nevertheless, he considered it important to learn about Islam, not relying upon hearsay that may be ignorant of its origin, history, beliefs, and practices. Instead, Christians should be humble as well as honest in learning about people of other faiths.

Richie concluded his inquiry with several observations concerning contemporary Christian relations with Muslims. They are relevant for interfaith relations from a Wesleyan perspective. If nothing else, they give us a starting point for engaging in dialog and cooperation with people from other faiths. Richie says:

1. Openness and tolerance toward other religions need not sacrifice a staunch commitment to the ultimate supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Gospel, or the Holy Scriptures.

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<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, quoted by Richie 84.

2. A deeper and fuller awareness of the significance of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world embracing the holy love of God for all humanity may be needed.
3. Real differences and disagreements with others may need to be aired honestly in humility without compromise or condescension.
4. Dependence on God to judge and reward or punish accordingly the good and evil in humans and in religions by wise and just standards could be helpful.
5. Commitment to development of our own authentic Christianity on personal and ecclesial levels may be a first priority in relation to other religions.
6. Energetically sharing the good news of faith, hope, and love in Christ will witness to all the world of the reality of divine truth and love.

Richie may not get far beyond the Replacement Model listed above. But he helps us to find bits of Wesley that may instruct us—directly or indirectly—in the far more complex, interdependent, and interreligious context in which we find ourselves today. His observations aid us in developing our own theology of interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

## Conclusion

How shall we then live and relate to others who believe very differently from ourselves? When I studied as an undergraduate student at Stanford University, I majored in Religious Studies. I scarcely took any courses in Christianity. For my own sake of religious integrity, I felt compelled to focus on other religions before assessing them. Some may consider my approach to be naïve, yet I highly valued what I learned from classes, devotees of different religions, and the desire first to understand, and then to be understood.

In our so-called postmodern world, we have become increasingly aware of the problems of bigotry, racism, cultural triumphalism, and other social forms of violence toward others in the world. These problems ought not to be ignored by Christians. We ignore at the risk of our standing before God, as well as the integrity, respect, and responsibility toward others who deserve to be loved as we would have them love us.

Finally, there are many ways by which Christians, churches, and denominations have established paths toward constructive interfaith relations. I prefer simple rather than complex principles for engaging in dia-

log and cooperation with people of other faiths or religions. The following principles are instructive for me as I seek to develop and promote interfaith relations, especially among those who share similar roots in the Wesleyan, Methodist, and Holiness traditions of Christianity. They include:

1. **Understand:** Seek first to understand before seeking to be understood. This does not preclude holding sacred specific beliefs, values, and practices, and sharing them in word and deed.
2. **Appreciate:** No one has all wisdom, and we can learn from one another. This requires genuine openness, honesty, humility, and respect for others.
3. **Cooperate:** Find ways to protect one another from neglect, misunderstanding, and injustice, and collaborate in serving those in need.

# **POLITICS, PARTICIPATION, AND THE *MISSIO DEI* IN THE THOUGHT OF MIROSLAV VOLF AND THE WESLEYAN TRADITION**

by

**Timothy R. Gaines**

What common ground do Wesleyans share with Miroslav Volf on the issue of political theology, and what might we learn from one another on this topic? The Wesleyan theological tradition offers a correlative concept of trinitarian theology and social ordering and also provides a natural connection between social ordering and the *Missio Dei*. I will seek to build on Volf's work by exploring the implications that the doctrine of the Trinity has brought to bear on political and social ordering. I will concentrate attention on the relations between persons and relational reconciliation, affirming that all symbiotic human life is essentially political.<sup>1</sup> By taking Volf's concept of "mutual interiority" as a point of departure, I then will examine the ways in which his understanding of the three Persons of the Trinity opens a promising possibility for the formation of a political theology that has the embrace of the other at its core, seen in Volf's advancement of what he calls "dynamic identity."

Although Volf has argued against the concept of participation in God's triune life, I will contend that the Wesleyan tradition contains the necessary resources to recover participation as a viable category that pro-

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<sup>1</sup>Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, Frederick Smith Carney, ed. (Liberty Fund, 1997).



vides a means of correlation between God's life in Trinity and a political and social relationality that is not only related to, but necessary for participation in the *Missio Dei*. Such an argument begins with a brief survey of Volf's own work on this issue.

### Relations Among Persons

Miroslav Volf's 1996 *Exclusion and Embrace* offers one of the more fecund attempts to deal with the question of the nature of the triune life of God and human relationships. Volf first advances a Moltmannian doctrine of the Trinity in which the Triune God is neither reduced to relationality itself, thus destroying the integrity of the persons as such, nor structured according to trinitarian hierarchy. Thus, "Persons are not relations; persons stand in relations that shape their identity."<sup>2</sup> Volf goes on to argue that relationships between gendered persons ought to be modeled on the relationality seen in the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather than constructing an essence of femininity or masculinity on the culturally and temporally situated biblical characters, Volf suggests that the relationships between sexed bodies ought to be modeled in some way on the Trinity, and thus negotiated according to mutual relationality rather than cultural essentialism. Male and female bodies are neither lacking nor complete in and of themselves, Volf argues. Their relationships do not consist in a formal essence, but in a dynamic relationality in which each needs the other in some way to be itself. This is the concept Volf refers to as "dynamic identity," the idea that identity is not a fixed essence within one's self, but that the self is conditioned in relationship to the other, an argument which demonstrates Volf's concern for establishing reconciled personal relationality in the likeness of the Trinity.

The other extended treatment of trinitarian likeness in human relationality in this volume produces a beautiful image of forgiveness. In Volf's words, it is "the boundary between exclusion and embrace."<sup>3</sup> Forgiveness in its most true form is a passage toward peace and reconciled relationality, the border crossed when former enemies take one another in their arms, embracing reconciliation as they embrace one another. Forgiveness is a borderland, a neutral place of in-between where former ene-

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<sup>2</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 180.

<sup>3</sup>Volf, *EE*, 125.

mies are presented with the distinct options of embrace or departure from one another's company without exacting retribution. Forgiveness is the predicate for either option, but reconciliation can only be the result of a willingness to cross out of the borderland, to take the former enemy into one's arms and be reconciled. Peace, then, "is communion between former enemies."<sup>4</sup> It is in the cross of Christ that this reconciliation is to be found. "At the heart of the cross is Christ's stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of *creating space in himself* for the offender to come in."<sup>5</sup> According to Volf:

The cross is the giving up of God's self in order not to give up on humanity; it is the consequence of God's desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion. The goal of the cross is the dwelling of human beings "in the Spirit," "in Christ," and "in God." Forgiveness is therefore not the culmination of Christ's relation to the offending other; it is a passage leading to embrace. The arms of the crucified are open—a sign of space in God's self and an invitation for the enemy to come in.<sup>6</sup>

The cross is the invitation to the enemy to be embraced and to enter, not only into reconciliation in abstraction, but "in God." The cross is an event which does not leave the Spirit nor the Father untouched by the wood or unpierced by the nails, for this trinitarian life of God is one of "mutual interiority."<sup>7</sup>

If this is the inner life of God, in what way is it enacted as God turns toward the world for the sake of reconciliation? In offering an answer, Volf says, "When the Trinity turns toward the world, the Son and the Spirit become, in Irenaeus's beautiful image, the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God's embrace. That same love that sustains non-self-enclosed identities in the Trinity seeks to make space 'in God' for humanity."<sup>8</sup> The divine space-making is an act of Christ on the cross, a thunderously fleeting moment in which the perichoretic dance comes to an abrupt suspension "so that sinful humanity

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<sup>4</sup>Volf, *EE*, 126.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Volf, *EE*, 128.

<sup>8</sup>Volf, *Ibid.*

can join in.”<sup>9</sup> If the gaping wound in the crucified Christ’s side is anything, it is a portal of invitation through which humanity is invited to reconciliation, a space-making welcome into “the eternal embrace of the triune God.”<sup>10</sup>

*After Our Likeness* is Volf’s attempt to examine the limits of the “almost self-evident proposition” that the church should correspond to the image of the triune God.<sup>11</sup> The cry of the Free Church that “We are the church!” deserves examination, Volf contends. That the church should correspond to God’s image is a given. It is the nature of this correspondence which is at the heart of his examination, a nature Volf paints epistemologically. “The way one thinks about God will decisively shape not only ecclesiology, but the entirety of Christian thought. . . . Conceiving the church in correspondence to the Trinity does not mean much more than thinking with theological consistency, all the while hoping that reality will not prove to be too recalcitrant.”<sup>12</sup>

Volf does not leave the matter there, for the nature of the correspondence of the church to the Trinity is not an epistemological task alone, but an eschatological task as well. That is, there is a soteriological grounding to the nature of the ecclesial correspondence to the Trinity such that correspondence itself is mediated through faith and baptism.<sup>13</sup> He writes: “Because churches, in the power of the Holy Spirit, already form a communion with the triune God, ecclesial correspondence to the Trinity can become an object of hope and thus also a task for human beings.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, as an object of hope based out of a soteriological eschatology, the church corresponds to the life of the Trinity in eschatological hope, a hope that is translated into the ecclesial life in terms of “task.”

There is a distinct sense in which Professor Volf understands the church to correspond to the Trinity by nature of eschatological hope or

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<sup>9</sup>Volf, *EE*, 129.

<sup>10</sup>Volf, *EE*, 131.

<sup>11</sup>Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 191. In examining this work, we are moving away from political and social ordering toward ecclesiological ordering, but we will continue to look toward the concepts of human relations in correspondence with those of the persons of the Trinity.

<sup>12</sup>Volf, *AOL*, 193.

<sup>13</sup>Volf, *AOL*, 195.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

task, but nothing more. In the places Volf employs language of reconciliation taking place “in God,” he stops short of developing a doctrine of *participation* which extends the mutual interiority of the Trinity to creation. Therefore, the church and human relationality in reconciliation may image the Trinity, but from a point outside of divinity itself. The nature of the relationship between the church and the Trinity, then, must be one of analogous formation, or the human “task” of shaping the church after the image of a dynamically identified God. For Volf, “person” and “communion” in ecclesiology cannot be the same as “person” and “communion” in the doctrine of the Trinity; they can only be understood as analogous.<sup>15</sup> Volf’s efforts are aimed at a full acknowledgement of creature as creature, and not as divine. The perfect love exchanged among the persons of the Trinity is not concomitant with the nature of creatures, for the love creatures exchange is broken and, therefore, “ecclesial communion is always a communion of the will.”<sup>16</sup>

Should Volf have concluded his argument there, the church, it seems, would be far more akin to a voluntary organization born from the willing of disparate human persons than a holy communion which is assembled by the Spirit in the name of the Son to the glory of the Father. But Volf does not leave us there. Rather, in a move which should leave the Wesleyan heart strangely warmed, he appeals to the person of the Holy Spirit. “The Son indwells human beings through the Spirit” so that “the unity of the church is grounded in the interiority of the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Though the relationship between the will and the Spirit remains somewhat unclear, what does come into ecclesiological focus is that the communion of the will, which understands its task as understanding and imaging the Trinity, is somehow resultant from the self-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. “It is not the mutual perichoresis of human beings,” Volf argues, “but rather the indwelling of the Spirit common to everyone that makes the church into a communion corresponding to the Trinity, a communion in which personhood and sociality are equi-primordial.”<sup>18</sup>

On this point, Wesleyan and Volfian ecclesiologies are quite parallel, as we shall see momentarily. A question comes begging, however, regard-

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<sup>15</sup>Volf, *AOL*, 199.

<sup>16</sup>Volf, *AOL*, 207. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup>Volf, *AOL*, 213.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

ing the nature of correspondence between the church and the Trinity. Is the correspondence one of pure analogy, epistemological in its essence and predicated on the will to and task of imaging the Trinity in eschatological hope, or does it have more substantially, predicated on the personal presence of the indwelling Spirit? Given these two alternatives, both of which appear in *After Our Likeness*, one is left to wonder how the ecclesial rallying cry “We are the church!” is to be interpreted.

### The Trinity and Social Ordering

In the same year that *After Our Likeness* was published, Volf also produced an article for *Modern Theology* in which he treats the doctrine of the Trinity in direct conversation with social ordering. Though Volf had claimed that the Trinity is grounds for an ecclesiological program, in this article he distinctly denies that the Trinity can be a social model, at least in the way that Nicholas Fedorov has conceived of it. At the heart of Volf’s objection is the idea that humanity can enter into the triune life of God as a historical reality, thus understanding the Trinity as the ontological locus for humanity. Those seeking to model society upon the Triune nature of God’s being suffer from a kind of theological amnesia, Volf charges, for they have forgotten “the most basic theological insight that it is impossible to copy God because oneness is etched into the very notion of God, and a shroud of mystery envelops the Holy Trinity.”<sup>19</sup> Still, Volf sees that a pathway is opened between copying God as if we were God and not being able to copy God at all, and argues for the possibility “of human responsibility which consists in ‘copying God in *some* respects.’”<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the concepts of person, perichoresis, and relations serve as analogous models for the ordering of human social order, but are limited insofar as human persons are not divine, and thus, do not enter into the same type of perichoritic relationality as the persons of the Trinity.

Secondly, Volf argues, “since the lives of human beings are inescapably marred by sin and saddled with transitoriness, in history human beings cannot be made into the perfect creaturely images of the

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<sup>19</sup>Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement” in *Modern Theology* (14:3: July, 1998), 404.

<sup>20</sup>Volf, “TSP,” 405.

Triune God which they are eschatologically destined to become.”<sup>21</sup> Any correspondence between humanity and the Trinity, especially in regard to social ordering, is relegated to the level of correspondence, rather than participation. As such, if the Trinity is to make a contribution to the social lives of humans, it will in the form of shaping “social vision,” in the sense that the Trinity images “the contours of the ultimate normative end toward which all social programs should strive.”<sup>22</sup>

In the argument that unfolds, the mission of Jesus Christ is a downward engagement from God to creation, seen most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ “in order to transform the unjust, deceitful, and violent kingdoms of this world into the just, truthful, and peaceful ‘kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah’ (Revelation 11:16).”<sup>23</sup> Volf concludes the argument by bringing the concepts he had been shaping into clarity. Against what he understands to be the “upward movement” of humanity into the triune life of God as advanced by Fedorov, he argues “that the social vision based on the doctrine of the Trinity should rest primarily on the downward movement in which God, in a sense, comes out of the circularity of divine love in order to take godless humanity into the divine embrace.”<sup>24</sup> A lovely image to be sure, this “divine embrace” is sketched according to the contours of the open arms of the Crucified One, who is made present by the indwelling Spirit. Such a vision leads Volf to make a striking statement in conclusion of his argument: “And it is in the downward movement of divine love that the Johannine Jesus Christ empowers his followers to participate. . . . The one who went to the cross in the power of the Spirit, dispenses the same Spirit to empower his followers to participate in the downward movement of God’s love which forgives sins and creates a community of joy in the midst of suffering.”<sup>25</sup>

Volf has articulated a theological vision for social and political order at the level of relations among human persons, which is said to be a corresponding analogy of the Trinity. Because humans are not divine, we do not understand the divine-human relationship in terms of participation in the sense that humanity is taken up in an upward motion; rather, the anal-

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Volf, “TSP,” 406.

<sup>23</sup>Volf, “TSP,” 415.

<sup>24</sup>Volf, “TSP,” 417.

<sup>25</sup>Volf, “TSP,” 418.

ogy is incarnated in creation by God's downward motion (mission) toward humanity in the person of the Son by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Volf offers a participation in which humans are not taken into God's life, but receive the salvific and reconciliatory benefits of the trinitarian life as created and sinful humanity. We have also seen that the only path open to imaging the life of God within creation is what appears to be an act of willing. Thus, a significant reliance upon theological epistemology emerges in Volf's project, for in order to will ourselves to image the Trinity, we must first know and understand the image we are attempting to copy. The image of the Trinity is not to be found ontologically in humanity. Any correspondence to God's triune life is one of knowing and willing ourselves to be finite copies of the divine image.

The final, and most recent, publication for our examination is an essay which was published in honor of Jürgen Moltmann, headlining a volume entitled *God's Life in Trinity*.<sup>26</sup> Here, Volf picks up some familiar themes, namely the ontological prohibition against understanding a direct correlation between humanity and God. Thus, if creatures correspond to the life of God, it is precisely *as creatures*.<sup>27</sup> While he still does not embrace a vision of participation in the life of God as the mode of correspondence, his language takes on a slightly different character, especially as he discusses our movement toward generosity, freedom, and communion. "But in our very being and activity, we are borne by God."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it sometimes takes a command from God to be borne by God's super-abundant generosity, but such a command "is part of a sketch of the character of life freed from sin. It nudges us to live as who we truly are as creatures redeemed by God."<sup>29</sup> Volf hints at the restoration of the political image as he discusses God's turn to the world in an outbound flow of love. The perfect communion of love which characterizes the triune life of God opens unidirectionally toward creation in establishing communion between God and creation, effectively restoring humans, for "we were created for communion with one another, not just with God."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, eds., *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup>Volf, *GLT*, 5.

<sup>28</sup>Volf, *GLT*, 8.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Volf, *GLT*, 11.

In what way are human creatures to “copy God” in countering our proclivity toward selfishness and be restored to true communion with one another? Volf tells us that the answer to such a question “would take us back once again to the triune God, this time less as a model to emulate and more as a source of that very emulation. But that is an exploration for another occasion.”<sup>31</sup> I hope that this essay may be just such an occasion. In what follows, we will turn to a brief consideration of the way in which Wesleyans engage such an argument. I will argue that Wesleyans ought to find significant agreement with Professor Volf’s trinitarian vision of social and political ordering. At the same time, we will explore the ways in which the Wesleyan tradition may be equipped to articulate participation beyond willing, precisely within the categories we have found in Volf’s project. The result, then, will be a vision of participation in the *Missio Dei* which is itself participation and sanctification.

### A Wesleyan Contribution

The first question to entertain when attempting to discuss a Wesleyan contribution to political theology is whether there is one to be made at all.<sup>32</sup> An appeal to John Wesley’s own politics seems misguided, not only for its anachronistic character, but also because Wesley’s political writings are deeply mired within his own theological defense of the structure of the British monarchy. We will follow Volf’s lead in approaching the topic through the analogical ability to receive and extend God’s embrace. Reconciliation becomes the political predicate, and as Volf has shown, reconciliation between enemies is Christian theology writ politically. Therefore, since the path into the conversation by way of political thought seems perilously obfuscated, and the theological possibilities are

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<sup>31</sup>Volf, *GLT*, 12.

<sup>32</sup>In the introduction to *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, Theodore Weber has written that the reason Methodists so rarely draw upon Wesleyan sources for constructing political theology “is that none exists in any form commonly acceptable among the spiritual legatees of John Wesley. There is no Wesleyan ‘political theology’—no political-moral doctrine expressive of Wesleyan theology manifest throughout Methodist history, taught universally in Methodist seminaries and church schools, sung in the hymns, preached from the pulpits, formative of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, motivationally powerful in the character of Methodists and others in the Wesleyan tradition.” See Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 19.



too salient to ignore, we will proceed along theological avenues, namely along the channels dedicated to trinitarian theology.

Even here, John Wesley himself seems to offer little direct assistance. In the absence of any systematic treatment of the doctrine in his corpus, his written reflections on the matter are sermonic and abbreviated. His 1775 sermon entitled “On the Trinity” treats the doctrine of the Trinity in a formal sense, rather than in regard to its implications for Christian life, implying that a thorough understanding of a trinitarian confession of God is not as important as the confession itself. It would be the *implications* of the confession about which Wesley would remain relatively silent, at least beyond the general soteriological themes. His concluding remarks on the Trinity simply urge his hearers to believe that God is mysteriously Three and One, but offer no vital examples for the way God’s trinitarian nature alters the form of the Christian life or confession. To adopt the parlance of classic trinitarian scholarship, Wesley’s remarks take a decisive turn toward a concern for the essence of the Trinity, rather than the economy.

Likewise, Charles Wesley’s hymns, though replete with trinitarian confession and references, offer few economic examples as to why God’s trinitarian nature makes much of a political difference for those who worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The verses contained within Charles’ trinitarian hymns do not attempt to connect a trinitarian confession of faith and salvation to political and social order. Gladly, Wesleyan theologians have not remained silent on the nature of political and social ordering in relation to the theological trajectory of their namesake, even while acknowledging the difficulties associated with such an enterprise. The Tenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies convened in 1997 occasioned at least two volumes which treat a Wesleyan understanding of the Trinity in relationship to political and social ordering.

The first, Theodore Weber’s *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, attempts to demonstrate that a Wesleyan understanding of political and social ordering begins with the restoration of the true political image, such that government becomes an act of ordering creation according to humanity’s charge to subdue the earth. Further, “this theological notion of government is trinitarian. It is the government at once of Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer; of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as unified divine personality.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Weber, 396.

In an argument which moves in parallel with that of Miroslav Volf, Weber goes on to argue that the relationship between the Trinity and the trinitarian form of political ordering is one of analogy. “When their governing is done rightly,” Weber argues, “human beings *image the government of God*. Their work is performed in *imitation of God*, and is informed by *analogy of God*.”<sup>34</sup> The trinitarian political ethic “that provides substance and direction for the vocation of political imaging,” Weber writes, “begins with the work of renewal of the fallen creation, that is, with the work of God in Christ, because neither the governing work of God nor the governing work of human beings can be understood rightly unless the grace of God opens the way to understanding. That is the point at which politics begins to be drawn into the order of salvation.”<sup>35</sup>

We see here a likeness to Volf in that humanity is to act by way of analogy in political ordering; but for Weber, an operative category has been introduced which is not found in Volf’s argument, the category of the healing of the political image, a category which harkens back to John Wesley’s well-known sermon “The New Birth.” It is there that Wesley speaks of the three images of God in which humanity was created: natural (wherein understanding, freedom of will and the affections are found), the moral image (which is rightly a proclivity to love which tempers all actions), and the political image (which enables humans to govern and order creation according to God’s purposes).<sup>36</sup> Though Wesley understands the moral image of God to be chief among the three in terms of human reflection of the *imago Dei*, he makes a strong argument for the “new birth” of the complete human person by virtue of “the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also ‘born of the Spirit.’”<sup>37</sup> The point we should see here is this: new birth for Wesley is a birth of the Spirit, a nearness unto indwelling, a continual openness to the ongoing presence of the Spirit through whom we have our new birth.

Thus, for the Wesleyan, the political and social ordering first begins with the restoration of the political image itself by the power of God’s grace, rather than attempting to map a political order of the triune image onto society or even the church. While political ordering may still be

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<sup>34</sup>Weber, 396. Emphasis original.

<sup>35</sup>Weber, 396.

<sup>36</sup>John Wesley, “The New Birth,” 6:66.

<sup>37</sup>John Wesley, “The New Birth,” 6:65.

analogous to the triune life of God, the very image and idea of such ordering cannot be known apart from the grace of God made manifest in Christ and brought ever so near by the Holy Spirit. To borrow from Volf's argument, it is in the "divine embrace" of the Holy Spirit that the Wesleyan begins understanding a political image out of which ordering grows.

The second volume to be published out of the Tenth Oxford Institute is a collection of essays edited by Douglas Meeks and appropriately titled *Trinity, Community and Power*. This collection approaches the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and political and social ordering from a position more toward the theological side of the conversation, with illuminating results.<sup>38</sup>

The essay which attracts our attention is written by Meeks, and deserves our consideration for the way in which it seeks to advance a Wesleyan understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity with issues of power, political and social ordering directly in mind. If the Wesleyan tradition has a distinct characteristic, Meeks argues, it is that "Wesleyan doctrine will emphasize our life *in* the Trinity as the sole source of the power by which we are to be the disciples of Jesus Christ."<sup>39</sup> The image of life in the Trinity is at the heart of the present conversation, and is an image with which Volf has taken issue.

If there is "a distinctively Wesleyan contribution" to the doctrine of the Trinity, Meeks proceeds to argue, it is that the Wesleyan tradition "emphasizes the life and initiating work of the Holy Spirit. If we see only the gifting of the Son without the work of the Holy Spirit, we miss the return of the gift of love, which is *sanctification*."<sup>40</sup>

It is this emphasis on sanctification which makes Wesleyan contributions to political theology both fascinating and fecund. Seen in the light of relations among human persons, sanctification is the restoration of the image which allows such relationships to function rightly. The hope of sanctification in the Wesleyan tradition is not only that right relationship

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<sup>38</sup>M. Douglas Meeks, *Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup>Meeks, 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. Emphasis original. We ought to also be careful that the reverse emphasis not overcome the Christological function in sanctification with pneumatological emphasis. Indeed, it is the Spirit who makes present the embrace of the Crucified One, so that as the arms of the Crucified One are open, we are contemporaneously embraced by the Holy Spirit.

with God will be restored, but that relationships with other humans will also be ordered without coercion, violence and retribution, and instead established into the good order of creation. The plainest account of sanctification that Wesley offers continually asserts that all one's actions toward God and neighbor "are governed by pure love," even to the point of loving one's enemies, another significant theme of Volf's vision of embrace. "He loves his enemies," Wesley writes of the sanctified person, precisely because "love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper."<sup>41</sup>

The negative image of purification might be assisted with the positive image of restoration, specifically of the natural, political and moral image of humanity, which Wesley understood to be a characteristic of the gift of sanctification. The this-worldly view of sanctification held by John Wesley pushes those who seek to establish a Wesleyan political theology to take seriously his continued injunctions to understand holiness not as mere forgiveness, but as the restoration of the moral, political and natural images of humanity, which includes the nature of human relationships. "Wesley was not content simply with forgiveness," Theodore Runyon reminds us, "because God wants more. Justification was incorporated into [Wesley's] quest for the full image of God."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the embrace of the enemy we see in Volf's work is in Wesleyan terms far more than simple forgiveness, but a restoration made possible by the return of the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Right relations among humans are a gift of sanctification.

Sanctification, too, gives Wesleyans a particular grammar for understanding the concepts of participation against which Volf has reacted. "Participation" was not language of Wesley's use, but it was an idea familiar to him. His *Notes on the New Testament* link 2 Peter 1:4 to the idea of "being renewed in the image of God,"<sup>43</sup> language which is familiar to a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification. Therefore, a Wesleyan understanding of participation in the divine life does not carry the same connotations as what Volf has seen in Fedorov, but is primarily tied to the

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<sup>41</sup>John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 19.

<sup>42</sup>Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 96.

<sup>43</sup>John Wesley, *Notes on the New Testament*.

restoration of the natural, political, and moral image in humans. In this sense, participation in the divine nature is participation *as creatures*, according to the Wesleyan tradition. “We do not participate in a divine righteousness that would make us God,” Stephen Long has written of a Wesleyan understanding of participation. “This can never be our righteousness, for this defines what is not creation. Creatures are not God.”<sup>44</sup>

A Wesleyan understanding of participation, then, takes seriously the charges that Volf has advanced against the concept of participation in the life of God, for his concern is that such a concept is incoherent if those participants are creatures. At the same time, the Wesleyan understanding of participation offers a correlation of grace between humanity and the Trinity in which the analogous human imaging of the Trinity needs not be a mere act of the will, but becomes an embrace in the open arms of the Crucified One.

Finally, a Wesleyan contribution to social and political ordering understands the restoration of the political image as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who makes present the divine embrace of the Crucified One. The gifting of the Son apart from the gifting of the Spirit dissolves sanctification into a soteriological mirage. If the arms of the Crucified One are indeed open, it is the Spirit who carries us into their embrace, who indwells human hearts for the sake of the “divine embrace” which restores the human political image. Thus, imaging God is not a matter of willful imaging for the Wesleyan, as much as it is correspondence by way of dynamic, personal interrelation. It is hopefully and freely being taken into the divine embrace in the power of the Spirit, and by virtue of this embrace, being restored to the divine image. Understood in terms of mission, the outward movement of the Spirit makes it possible for humanity to be embraced by the triune life of God, and thus restored, sanctified and redeemed; the restoration of the divine image, then, is not only participation in God’s life, but simultaneously participation in God’s mission of redemption and restoration. In this way, the *Missio Dei* has everything to do with political and social ordering for the Wesleyan, for it is only in the power of God’s restoration and redemption that human political and social relationships can be rightly ordered.

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<sup>44</sup>D. Stephen Long, *John Wesley’s Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 188.

### Copying God: A Volfian Hope in a Wesleyan Way

We have seen that Miroslav Volf has given us fascinating ways to envision social and political life in relation to the triune God, and their relational character easily piques the theological palate of discerning Wesleyans. We have traced the contours of a Wesleyan offering as we enter into conversation with Volf regarding social and political ordering as they are related to the doctrine of God's triunity and the *Missio Dei*. In what ways, then, can this conversation move forward? Might these two streams of thought, which are generally in agreement, flow into one another? On issues of trinitarian affirmation, relationality, and social ordering in which relations between persons are seen as natural to political ordering, there is much ground in common. Volf's alluring vision of social ordering as an image of the Trinity is certainly appealing to Wesleyan theological sensibilities. The images Volf employs of a life freed from sin which pushes humans to live into their true political image are also images with which Wesleyans ought to be comfortable.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Volf has gifted Wesleyans with advancing notions of communion, forgiveness, love, and gift-giving as ways in which the Christian life images the life of God.

As in any good conversation, there are also points of difference at which the streams diverge, mainly encountering issues related to participation in God's triune life, and the nature of human realization of God's triune image in social ordering. That is, while Wesleyans affirm political and social ordering as imaging the Trinity, they do so on grounds of a dynamic trinitarian relationality to creation, whereas Volf hesitates to suggest that such a correlation is possible.

As Wesleyan theology seeks to engage Volf's work, there are three distinct ways in which Wesleyans might enter into critically hospitable dialog with Volf's work. First, it is to understand and affirm the Wesleyan position that the life of the disciple of Jesus Christ is realized by participation in the life of the Trinity. Secondly, this image of participation is one of a creaturely, dynamic, and personal nature, made possible only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, this dynamic and personal presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit is precisely the sanctifying power by which the political image of humanity is restored, establishing just, equitable, and peaceable relations among humans, the basis of social and political ordering. In this way, participation in God's triune life is sanctification, which is concomitantly the outflowing effect of the *Missio Dei*.

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<sup>45</sup>Volf, *GLT*, 18.

Our first claim is that discipleship to Jesus Christ involves participation in the triune life of God. Though this claim does not engage Volf's thought directly, it is a necessary step in making the remainder of the argument. What we need to say here, however, is that discipleship itself is that which is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian disciples are dynamically empowered for faithful discipleship to the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father. Discipleship, we contend, is not an enactment of the will to follow Jesus Christ as much as it is the ongoing reception and return of the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not only following, but also being grasped by the divine embrace of the Spirit in an act of joyful obedience. Therefore, participation is made synonymous with Volf's image of the divine embrace; it is taking most seriously his argument" "The one who went to the cross in the power of the Spirit now dispenses the same Spirit to empower his followers to participate in the downward movement of God's love which forgives sins and creates a community of joy in the midst of suffering."<sup>46</sup>

Our second claim qualifies the first, specifically in the sense that participation in God's life is participation *as creatures*. Humans do not constitute the triune communion that is God's life, but are instead taken into it by virtue of the open arms of the Crucified One, brought near to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit. These "two hands of God" not only reach toward creation in a divine embrace, but also uphold creation within the love exchanged between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, such that the love exchanged among the persons of the Trinity is the space in which creation lives and moves and has its being. This is a hospitable act of the most radical nature, of opening a place in one's very life to make room for the other. Volf, following Colin Gunton, understands *perichoresis* in precisely this sense, suggesting that a better analogy for translating the phrase would be "making space" rather than "dancing round."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the participation of human creatures in the triune life of God cannot be said to be likened to divine participation, but is qualified significantly by virtue of being creatures. A Wesleyan understanding of participation is prepared to follow Volf in critiquing notions of participation which elevate humans to the point that we can say, with Fedorov, "God has placed in our hands all the means for regulating cosmic disorders."<sup>48</sup> At the same

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<sup>46</sup>Volf, "TSP," 418.

<sup>47</sup>Volf, "TSP," 409.

<sup>48</sup>Volf, "TSP," 404.

time, a Wesleyan view maintains that participation in God's life is nothing other than the divine welcome of creatures into a hospitable space of renewal, redemption, and sanctification, a place in which the political image can once again correspond to the Trinity by virtue of the Spirit's dynamic, personal, and ongoing presence in the world.

Finally, a Wesleyan understanding of participation draws together the work of the Holy Spirit as an act of sanctification whereby the political image is renewed. Though Volf's project charts a remarkably parallel trajectory to those of Wesleyans regarding the Trinity, it is at this point that the largest point of difference begins to emerge. For Volf, it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which brings about the correspondence between humanity and the Trinity, which is true for the Wesleyan as well. But, for the Wesleyan, there is a return; grace is responsible. Therefore, the restoration of the political image, that which enables the sinful creature called human to be rightly ordered to one another *as creatures*, is the return of the gift of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. It is sanctification. As Meeks ably phrases it, "if we do not go beyond justifying grace, we are not yet living in the fullness of the Trinity, for we have not yet returned the gift. Holiness means the practice of love in justice as the return of the gift of God's love."<sup>49</sup>

For the Wesleyan, the pneumatological "divine embrace" of Volf's imagination is not an embrace that places humanity in a kind of static hold, but it is an embrace for the sake being taken into the triune life of God, of being returned as gift in the power of the One whose presence itself is sheer gift, of participation in God's triune life, not as a divine Person, but as a creature whose political image is being restored by virtue of his or her sanctification. While Wesleyans gladly stand ready to adopt Volf's image of the divine embrace, we also anticipate that such an image connotes a hospitable invitation to enter, partake, and become what we have been created to be. To appeal to Irenaeus' familiar image once again, the 'two hands of God' do not hold creation at a distance, but reach toward it, accommodate it, and embrace it. It is precisely this divine embrace which is also the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the personal nearness of the Trinity in the Third Person which restores in humans the divine image, which is synonymously termed sanctification.

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<sup>49</sup>Meeks, 27.



Further, the introduction of the category of sanctification allows copying God to be an act of divine grace, rather than the enactment of the human will to image the Trinity. Absent the category of sanctification, the images of divine embrace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit take on fascinating characteristics as they are applied to concepts of social and political ordering. Are we socially ordered toward peace and flourishing as a power of the will in hopes of copying God, or can we say that social ordering is what the return of the gift of the Spirit looks like in this fallen and finite world? Are we able to correspondingly image the Trinity as an epistemological enterprise which relies on our correct image of God as Three-One and a subsequent will to copy such an image, or is our correspondence characterized by knowledge in a personal, intimate and dynamic sense, such that our imaging the Trinity is precisely the return of the gift of God's presence as our sanctification? In view of a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification and the operations of the Holy Spirit, the Wesleyan tradition ought to be aligned with the latter option.

Wesleyans cannot rightly understand that imaging the Trinity involves willing ourselves into the *Missio Dei*, but being graciously embraced by the mission in the power of the Spirit. In this sense, the *Missio Dei* is at once also the restoration of the political image, a dynamic embrace, and being taken into the triune life of God, not in the same nature as the Father, Son or Holy Spirit, but precisely as creatures by virtue of the Spirit's "divine embrace." Denial of such an embrace and participation in God's life runs the risk of rupturing sanctification from mission. It is in the divine embrace of the two hands of God that sanctification becomes participation in the *Missio Dei*, a restoration of the political image, embodied in the embrace of the one who was once an enemy. Participation in the triune life of God, then, is being held in the divine embrace, to be restored into our creaturely image, to be graciously called into the *Missio Dei*.

# EMPIRE, EVIL, ESCHATON, AND LOCATION OF FORGIVENESS AS A POLITICAL/APOCALYPTIC ACT<sup>1</sup>

by

Hank Spaulding

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt says that our ambivalence with politics arises out both hope and fear. There is “fear that humanity could destroy itself through politics and through the means of force at its disposal, and . . . the hope that humanity will come to its senses and rid the world . . . of politics.”<sup>2</sup> Politics often oscillates between these two possibilities. However, fear suggests that without politics we will be subject to the evils we fear. Arendt argues that we are yet to rid ourselves from evil. Politics does play some role in the very evil we wish to abolish. Citizens fear death and from this we organize ourselves politically in order to fend off death. In turning to politics, however, we grow our power to the point that it becomes imperial in nature. Yet, despite our turning to empire, the onslaught of death has not been decreased.

Building upon the insights of Arendt, I will argue that Empire cannot provide an appropriate deliverance from evil and death. Only in the Trinitarian God can we find hope to defeat the cycles of violence. Evil and death can only be overcome by the Triune God and by our embodying the

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Henry W. Spaulding II, Brad Burroughs, Joshua Houben, Brett McKey, and Randy Maddox for helpful insights and critiques on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*. Ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 97.

apocalyptic-political act of forgiveness. I will show this by first defining evil and the ways in which empires deal with problems. Secondly, I will critique the claim of empires that they have authority over death by highlighting the apocalyptic drama of the Triune God. Lastly, I will show that the appropriate Christian political act is an embodied practice of apocalyptic forgiveness.

## Empire

Empires are a unique political reality. It is worth noting the distinction between an empire and its counterpart, a kingdom. An empire differs from kingdom by seeking to advance local interests on a global scale. Unlike kingdoms, which rule within a given sphere, empires do not understand their soteriological scope being limited by permanent borders—and those borders are becoming even more ephemeral in our increasingly globalized, postmodern world. Empires offer to the populace it governs a hope against death and evil. They produce significance by promising protection from evil and thus establish themselves as “savior-like” structures.

Carl Schmitt understands empires to be groups of human beings that class all people as either their friends or enemies.<sup>3</sup> These groupings are the means whereby the empire orders a populace according to the imperial interests. The “friends” are all those who further the empire, and thus are linked with life. The “enemies” are those who seek to limit the influence and power of empire. Such grouping provides the legitimization the empire needs for its rule and programs. However, empires exceed merely political definitions for their pseudo-eternal status: “Empire sets in motion an ethico-political dynamic that lies at the heart of its juridical concept. . . . Empire exhausts historical time, suspends history, and summons the past and future within its own ethical order. In other words, Empire presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary.”<sup>4</sup> The actions of empires legitimate themselves by carrying out “justice,” that is, achieving their own ends for their friends and against their enemies.

Hence, an empire is a unique political reality because it divides according to friend and enemy on a pseudo-eternal scale. The justice

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<sup>3</sup>Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11.

meted out by empires is according to the friend/enemy distinction. Even if the distinction is false, the empire is able to transcend time and space in order to justify its actions according to its promise to overcome evil and death. Empire provides the populace with the means to understand *how* it provides the only avenue for safety and security. Thus, the ethico-political dynamic set up by empire should be permanent, eternal, and necessary. In all of this, empire gains legitimization from citizens and consumers through the promise that it will alleviate and perhaps eliminate death and evil. Imperial ideology does not construct this logic on its own. It must mobilize and summon “the past and future within its own ethical order.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Architects of Empire Political Philosophy**

Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes represent the past summoned and the means that Empire uses to legitimate its rule. It is important to note that neither Machiavelli nor Hobbes is an imperialist. Rather, both develop a philosophical justification for violence as a means of political self-defense of a kingdom-political reality. In recent times, these two architects of modern political philosophy have been mobilized by contemporary imperialists to achieve their political interests.

**Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469-1527). Machiavelli stands in history as a unique political philosopher. He is a political realist and shows the strongest example of this philosophy. His publication *The Prince* seeks to depict the role of the prince as savior, yet also shows consequences of this savior-like philosophy. Machiavelli writes, “it is much safer to be feared than to be loved when one of those two must be lacking.”<sup>6</sup> Fear is necessary for Machiavelli as a mechanism to maintain the rule of the prince. The people should fear the prince for his capabilities for violence on his people, but also fear the absence of the prince and his protection. Deep in the philosophical realism of Machiavelli is the notion that the prince must maintain his rule against foreign entities at all costs.

Machiavelli understood the rule of the prince as the means of bringing to the common populace the rule of an exterior government. Machiavelli writes, “The common people . . . give their support to one man and make him prince in order to have protection of his authority.”<sup>7</sup> For Machi-

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*. Trans. Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 34.

avelli, virtue is only a secondary pursuit to maintaining rule. Accordingly, he writes, “any harm done to a man must be the kind that removes any fear of revenge.”<sup>8</sup> Here, Machiavelli suggests that if a prince wants to maintain order, he must respond in order to simultaneously destroy the immediate threat and deter any future dissention. He is not held accountable for any vices of his own because all is done so the people may be free from persecution of foreign rule.

Machiavelli provides a basic logic for developing a philosophical method of understanding the mechanisms of empire. He presents violence as the means that empire uses to achieve necessary order. Violence maintains the internal order for the prince and the external security for the common people. Violence is a tool of political order. Machiavelli presents a chilling realism to his readers, and yet fuels the ideological development of the liberal tradition. The tradition seeks to make animosity into a political tool, thus enabling government to provide a savior-like protection. Machiavelli’s means of self-defense are mobilized in an imperial system to legitimize and perpetuate its rule on a global scale.

**Thomas Hobbes** (1588-1679). Another figure whose thought has been appropriated by imperial entities is Thomas Hobbes. His work *Leviathan* develops his understanding of human nature and by extension the role of government in the midst of the human condition. For Hobbes, human beings are a combination of moving particles heading towards objects. Humans are only truly free when they become unconstrained and are allowed to move towards objects. Desire is the motion of a man towards an object. Thus, freedom is understood as the ability to achieve one’s desires unhindered. As Hobbes says, a freeman is one “not hindered to do what he has a will to.”<sup>9</sup> The state (the great Leviathan), according to Hobbes, is the giver of this freedom. Humans are not capable of moral choice. They are rational but only rational according to their own self-preservation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, each human is set against each human in war to secure objects according to their capacity to desire. Humans would con-

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 11.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 139.

<sup>10</sup>For a developed contemporary working of this idea, see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Free Press, 2006), 149-51.

tinue in this motion unless they were constrained by some outside force. This is symbolized as the war against and between all.

The establishment of the social contract presents an agreed amount of freedom for all men so they may possess the maximum amount of freedom without infringing on another's freedom. The basis for government, or the Leviathan, is to maintain the social contract.<sup>11</sup> Hobbes lays out a political philosophy where sovereignty is necessary for peace and the end of violence. Much like Machiavelli, the means of the Leviathan are violent in order to secure this peace. One of the reasons that many pledge allegiance to the sovereign is fear of death and loss of freedom.<sup>12</sup>

The Leviathan implicitly promises freedom from the fear of death by threatening death to dissenters. Hobbes' thought is misappropriated by empire to include this policing force that must always exist, because animosity will always exist between people. Implicitly, if empires can be allowed by citizens to hold a pseudo-eternal status, their long-term reward is alleviation of death. If an empire can promise freedom from the fear of death, it begins to be an entity that offers salvation.<sup>13</sup> The evils and death are confronted by empire with different forms of evil and death. This makes the salvific process of empire an inherently violent one. We are then left to conclude that empires are a different form of evil, a systemic evil.

Empires deploy different techniques to maintain sovereignty. In an increasingly postmodern, globalized world, empire has been able to advance its claim in new and subversive ways. The globalized world can be mobilized to intensify the mechanisms of violence and fear. It needs to be intensified because Machiavelli understood fear and violence to be an inadequate motivator to alone maintain sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> Rather, as Daniel Bell writes, it takes a thinker like Hobbes to complete Machiavelli. Bell writes "what was needed was a way for citizens to participate in, and a reason for them to collaborate with, this induction of fear."<sup>15</sup> Postmodernization and globalization contribute to this move to participation and even

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 123-31.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 132.

<sup>13</sup>The imperial soteriological shift redefines earthly life as the ultimate good.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel M. Bell, Jr. "The Politics of Fear and the Gospel of Life," in *Belief and Metaphysics*. Ed. Peter M. Candler, Jr., and Conor Cunningham (London: SCM Press. 2007), 429-33.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, 432.

the continuation of fear and violence. The methods set forth by Machiavelli and Hobbes, enhanced by postmodernization and globalization, achieve a “therapy of violence.” This therapy, offered by Empire or any systemic evil, enables the monarch to define evil and good by his own standards.

To achieve this definition, at least in the way empire wishes to according to a reassessment of friend and enemy on an eternal global spectrum, empire uses two contemporary political mechanisms (postmodernism and globalization). These work toward the enhancement of sovereignty and even citizen participation. This is most obvious in media relations in the new century. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky provide an explanation for the role of the media:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society.<sup>16</sup>

Herman and Chomsky are arguing for an understanding of media that assists a political entity to train the populace in a specific social ethic. The domination of the media is a symptom of the postmodern setting. Before the postmodern era, the economic-political landscape was dominated by the manipulation and production of goods (raw and durable). Now it is dominated by the manipulation and manufacturing of information.<sup>17</sup> The mass media is now able to produce “truth.” An example is the manufactured anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. The constant is the ability to redefine the significance of events or people. This means that empire has the ability to define evil as any opposition to its sovereignty alone. This is especially the case now that globalization is playing a crucial role in the mechanism of systemic violence.

The violence we thought we could rid ourselves of by paying allegiance to an empire has only led to the increase of violence. Although this empire-violence narrative is counter to a Christian worldview, subtle compliance with an empire happens easily and ends in the empire’s elevation to a savior-like structure. For the Christian citizen, this elevation is

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<sup>16</sup>Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books. 2002), 1.

<sup>17</sup>This thesis is explicit in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 280-303.

inherently problematic. Of course, political entities can be good sources of order established in a fallen world. However, Christians should be cautious when the ways they talk of imperial régimes undercut their confessions of faith in the Trinitarian God.

One example of this undercutting is seen in Isaac Watts (1674-1748). A well-known English hymn-writer, he published a series of hymns called *The Psalms of David* (1719) in which he replaced Israel with the British Empire. The result was a transfer of significance from the Psalter's emphasis on Israel and its priority to the British Empire. Watts is not necessarily in these hymns trying to articulate a political theology; however, one can see in Isaac Watts' collection the powers of the Hebrew monarch being transferred to Jesus Christ, and "by implication if not always directly to the British King."<sup>18</sup> For example, in Watts' hymn based on Psalm 60, he writes: "Sing to the Lord, ye distant lands. Sing Loud with solemn voice. While British tongues exalt his praise, And British hearts rejoice."<sup>19</sup> Watts goes on to make the point that the British Isle is the chosen land of God. He draws out these implications to include the British Army as an agent. As he writes in Psalm 20:

In his salvation is our Hope,  
And in the name of Israel's God  
Our Troops shall lift their Banners up,  
Our navys spread their Flags abroad.

O may the Memory of thy Name  
Inspire our Armies for the Fight!  
Our Foes shall fall and die with Shame,  
Or quit the Field with shameful Flight. (verses 4 and 6)<sup>20</sup>

The salvation of God here is linked by Watts to the actions of the British Army. Though Watts suggests that the salvation of Great Britain lies in part with the British military, he still maintains a divine role in war.

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<sup>18</sup>Isaac Watts, *Psalms of David*, in John Hull, "From Experiential Educator to Nationalist Theologian: The Hymns of Isaac Watts," *Panorama: International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values*. Vol. 14 no. 1, Summer 2002, 99.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, 98.

<sup>20</sup>Isaac Watts, *Psalms of David*, in John Hull, "Isaac Watts and the Origins of British Imperial Theology," *International Congregational Journal*. Vol. 4 No. 2, February 2005, 65.



Thus, Watts also aligns himself with the attractiveness of imperial violence. Lacking a clearer distinction, he also suggests that God's actions are simultaneous with that of imperial violence.

In contrast to Watts, we see in one of his contemporaries resistance to this role of empire and political entities, especially pertaining to their violence. Charles Wesley (1707-1788), another British hymnist, wrote in reference to several of the same Psalms as Isaac Watts, yet with a different purpose. In relation to Psalms 20 and 60, Wesley took a different stance than Watts:

Some in Chariots put their trust,  
In Horses some confide,  
We of GOD will make our boast,  
And in his Word abide:  
Him we ever bear in mind,  
All his faithful Mercies claim,  
Life, and Strength, and Succour find  
In Jesus' conquering Name.<sup>21</sup>

For Watts, his hymns were a chance to educate the populace on the glory of the British army, navy, and chariots, as well as the power and glory of God. However, Wesley shows that the hymns and Psalms are only a chance to show where our trust should be. It is not in chariots, horses, or the British Empire that we boast, but in God and his mercy we claim.

The Wesleyan political critique is that we cannot begin to hand over our understanding of salvation to political regimes and empires. This is due to the need to reclaim the eschatological foundation of Christian faith. Christian citizens are aware that political violence does not achieve the sought-after end. Isaac Watts would agree that the end is peace, yet where Watts and Wesley would disagree is the means of getting there. The means, as the Christian narrative and the Wesleys understand it, are peace and God's apocalyptic breaking in on creation. We can turn to John Wesley, who sums up the Trinitarian critique railed against empire when he concludes his sermon on the *New Creation*:

. . . violence shall be heard no more, neither wasting or destruction seen on the face of the earth. . . . And to crown all there

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<sup>21</sup>Charles Wesley, *Psalm XX*. Appears also in MS Emory, 17–19; and MS Fish, 17–21. Published posthumously in *Methodist Magazine* 3 (1800): 241–42; and *Poetical Works*, 8:39–40.

will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!<sup>22</sup>

God's authority transcends the authority that empire has over the human condition and in the process of establishing peace.

### Trinitarian Apocalypticism

The Christian must question the violence of human empires. John Wesley's sermons identify the final goal of the Christian life as blessedness in the "Three-One" God. This is an act not achieved by violence; it is an act of the Trinity. The signal act of the Trinity is confessed in the line from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381): "he [Christ] was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father."<sup>23</sup> Here is the beginning of the breaking in of the new reality of the kingdom of God, which will have its final triumph at the consummation. It is this act, the crucifixion and resurrection, which presents an apocalyptic view of the Trinity and its overcoming of death. Christ enters death from the outside, not as a warrior God but as a tacit victim. As Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar writes, "The Cross is the full achievement of the divine judgment on 'sin' (2 Corinthians 5, 21) summed up, dragged into daylight and suffering through in the Son. Moreover, the sending of the Son in 'sinful flesh' took place only so as to make it possible to 'condemn (*katakrinein*) sin in the flesh' (Romans 8, 3)."<sup>24</sup>

God deals with death and evil, not from an outside place of power using violence and war to eradicate evil. Rather, God "others" himself to the point of dereliction on the cross and deals from death as one who submits to it. However, as we confess that this is where death ultimately meets its death, Christ distances himself from the Father to a place where

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<sup>22</sup>John Wesley, *The New Creation*, in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. Ed. Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 499-500.

<sup>23</sup>Here we must note the Spirit's role in the resurrection, though not explicitly stated in this part of the creed. If the Spirit was not understood as a part of this act, then the resurrection would not be a Trinitarian event.

<sup>24</sup>Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*. Trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 119.

even the Father appears as an enemy to Christ. Balthasar continues in a reflection on Good Friday:

You cry into the void: "Father!" And the echo resounds. The Father has heard nothing. . . . The Father has gone over to your enemies. Together they have plotted against you. . . . He has loved your murders so much that he has betrayed you, his Only begotten.<sup>25</sup>

Here the distinction between friend and enemy begins to dissolve. This is an apocalyptic judgment on such distinctions.

This thought-provoking reflection teases the imagination of the reader to begin to envision a Trinitarian critique of empire. Empire's soteriology consists of, through the means of globalization and postmodernization, seeking out the enemy to destroy them. In contrast, a Trinitarian Apocalypse reveals that with the very life of the Son, God seeks not to destroy but rather to reconcile and offer forgiveness as among the condemned.<sup>26</sup> God seeks out the enemy, but also achieves the one end empire only promises to do. Confession of Christ as Lord for the Christian includes knowing, "what no philosophy can know, except through faith, namely, God's ever greater Trinitarian love; and in order, also, to vanquish what no philosophy can make an end of, human dying so that the human totality may be restored in God."<sup>27</sup>

This is political because it locates human dying as something God ultimately has control of, while imperial ideology locates earthly life as the highest good. Accordingly, it means re-evaluating who is classified "enemy" (contra Carl Schmitt). Christ ends the cycle of violence and death in his willingness to give up his life. As Balthasar shows, this death and suffering Christ overcomes evil by entering into it and subsequently being raised to the resurrected form.<sup>28</sup> This is the apocalyptic judgment of

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<sup>25</sup>Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1954), 109-10.

<sup>26</sup>For a development of this logic, see Rowan Williams, *Balthasar and the Trinity*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (New York: Cambridge, 2004), 37-50.

<sup>27</sup>Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 65.

<sup>28</sup>"Form" here is simply meant to signify the reality that Balthasar himself refers to as the incomprehensible image of God presented to us in the gospel narrative. See *Seeing the Form: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic*. Trans. Erasmo Levine and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).

Christ on the cross precisely because it is the entering of God into a reality that is opposed to God, namely death. The othering of God and willingness to die for the sake of God's people on the cross reveals God as the God who overcomes violence, evil, and death with the therapy of love. This is an act only God can do because God possesses the infinite merit to overcome the finitude of the violence of death through the resurrection of Christ.

Thus, the Triune God provides the only true political action because God divides friend and enemy in the truest sense. The enemy of God is death (2 Corinthians 15). Yet, in God's apocalyptic entrance into death, God destroys the enemy without destroying humanity. This makes possible forgiveness of sins and freedom from the enemy, death. This reconciliation by God provides the basis of a Christian apocalyptic politic and a means to overcome death and violence. Christians as citizens are called to live this out because God has achieved it first in Christ.

### **Locating Forgiveness as an Politico-Apocalyptic Act**

The work of God in Christ suggests an engendered set of practices which evacuate violence. For these practices to be uniquely a Christian apocalyptic political act, they must meet two criteria. First, the act must be an act which offers true hope in the overcoming of death, namely because of the confession of the resurrection of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Second, the Christian faith must provide a means for Christians to live in a world amidst terrible suffering.<sup>30</sup> Christ's work of reconciliation and forgiveness on the cross defines these two requirements. This work presents an alternative to Christians in the wake of Empire.

There are some difficulties in applying this on a political level. We could understand this in a Hobbesian fashion when he argues for the ultimate war as the war against every man. This leads to the establishment of the social contract to tame the animosity between people. However, rather than animosity or the war between individuals, Christian forgiveness tran-

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<sup>29</sup>See Robert W. Jenson, "Eschatological Politics and Political Eschatology," in *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1995), 20.

<sup>30</sup>Jürgen Moltmann writes, "The *Sitz im Leben* of political theology today is the life of Christians in the world. It is the theological reflection of Christians who for the sake of their consciences suffer in the midst of the public misery of society and struggle against this misery." In "Political Theology," in *The Experiment Hope*. Ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1975), 101.

scends these factors and makes room for Christ to work toward reconciliation. Christian forgiveness is the proper response to wrongs done. Christian forgiveness even fulfills what Machiavelli needs in an act that removes fear of violent response,<sup>31</sup> because forgiveness allows for the process of reconciliation to start. Forgiveness presents difficulty for empire because it undoes the cycle of violence, which is one of its central mechanisms.

This being said, forgiveness is an apocalyptic political act because it achieves a common practice that restores community between estranged individuals. It is apocalyptic because by forgiving as Christ forgives we witness to the reality of the revelation and breaking in of Christ. It is political because it transcends the earthly political situation and practices the politics of the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God. Balthasar says,

. . . since we are part of the body of Christ, also, in a sense, inside one another; and indeed, not only with a group, not only with a communion or church, but with all those for whom Christ surrendered himself, in expiation, for the forgiveness of sins. No one is excepted from this. Therefore, a Christian does not know the word “enemy.”<sup>32</sup>

Christian forgiving makes death the only enemy and reaches for reconciliation between individuals. This can only be possible because forgiveness is apocalyptic. If death were the true end for the Christian, forgiveness would be a mere gesture in the face of the monstrous. But it is not. The Christian believes that at the eschaton and general resurrection of the dead all violences, wrongs, and injustices will finally be rightly judged and wrongs redeemed. Forgiveness suspends the present situation until that time.

Forgiveness is an apocalyptic-political act because it gives hope that ultimately is immune to death and a way to exist amidst suffering. This practice of forgiveness allows Christians not to slip into patterns of violence amidst the empire’s usual coercion. The question, of course, remains as the present realism is filled with so much political rhetoric that fuels the mechanisms of empire. With this in mind, can this method of

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<sup>31</sup>Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 11.

<sup>32</sup>Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostle’s Creed* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 92.

apocalyptic-political forgiveness work in a concrete situation of continuing empire? Noting an example may help bring an answer.

On October 6, 2006, Charles Roberts entered an Amish school in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, with the intent to bind, sexually assault, and ultimately murder ten girls. Roberts succeeded in killing five. Many commentators later wrote that what Roberts did was nothing short of monstrous. But in a strange turn of events, the Amish forgave Roberts and his family. One commentator, David C. Steinmetz, Professor of History of Christianity Emeritus at Duke Divinity School, wrote:

And so the Amish forgave Roberts for imprisoning their children, for maiming and murdering them, and even for intending to molest them while they were helplessly in his power. They forgave him, not because he had been driven by private demons or because his act was anything but heinous. They forgave him because they thought Jesus had told them to and they weren't clever enough to think he didn't mean it.<sup>33</sup>

There is a tension with this story and the Amish ability to forgive. We could examine the criteria of forgiveness presented by Jacques Derrida,<sup>34</sup> but it remains unclear where Derrida sees the line between human wrongs and the monstrous. Yet, Derrida argues, "forgiveness only acquire(s) its meaning and its possibility of forgiveness where it is called on to do the impossible and to forgive the unforgivable."<sup>35</sup> The tension lies in Derrida between what is difficult and what is easy to forgive, and what is monstrous and not humanly forgivable. At the very least, Derrida wishes to dispel any notion of coming by forgiveness easily. For forgiveness to be genuine, it must come up against the difficult and even the impossible. What Roberts did to the Amish seems impossible to forgive. The question remains. Was it monstrous?

Derrida maintains certain events are too monstrously significant to be forgiven. He argues that, since it is impossible to distinguish what passes over into the monstrous, we must postulate that what Roberts did represents the worst that a human can do. At the very least, we can

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<sup>33</sup>David C. Steinmetz. "Forgiveness springs from their faith," in *Raleigh News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), October 13, 2006.

<sup>34</sup>Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible," in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*, 29.

acknowledge the seeming impossibility of forgiving a man who murdered and intended to sexually assault several young girls. The difficulty of forgiveness increases when one knows the Amish to be a peaceful people who have little means of self-defense. If this were done anywhere to anyone, we would still have trouble. The impossible can be done on a human scale, but the monstrous exceeds mere human capabilities according to Derrida.

Yet, there is something pure in the forgiveness of the Amish of Pennsylvania. Steinmetz continues, "But the Amish matched their words with deeds. They invited Roberts' widow to the funerals of their children, insisted that some of the money raised to help them be used to help her, and even attended the graveside service of the man who has so cruelly wrested their children from them."<sup>36</sup> These actions represent not only a communal ordering, which is a political act, but serves as a witness to worldly citizens engulfed in the monotony of violence. It is a witness because the imperial makes no room for a Sovereign who comforts both the widow of a gunman and the parents of murdered children. Furthermore, imperialism cannot comprehend or abide a savior who loves the vile, even to the point that God gives up God's own life in Christ for them. God does not will the death of friend or enemy (Ezekiel 33:11), but God wills that all might live. This is the witness and the meaning behind why the Amish can forgive. As Steinmetz concludes:

. . . the unworldly but morally substantial Amish gave their worldly but morally less substantial fellow citizens a brief glimpse of a peaceable kingdom, where the lion lies down with the lamb, where swords will be beaten into plowshares, where violence ceases and a gentle magnanimity reigns. You can't say it is impossible or hopelessly utopian, because you have just seen it done.<sup>37</sup>

Christian forgiveness means forgiving without condition, and forgiving in this way witnesses to the new reality breaking in on us. This forgiveness meets the requirements of an apocalyptic political act. Accordingly, for the Amish, forgiveness proclaims a hope that their children's lives may be taken, but that they too will rise again. Also, it provides a way to exist amid suffering by allowing reconciliation and God's forgiveness to be the

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<sup>36</sup>David Steinmetz, "Forgiveness springs from their faith."

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

way of life among people. Even the monstrously significant events we witness, according to forgiveness, should not define relations among people.

Acknowledging the monstrously significant begins the process towards forgiveness in a community. Forgiving sets the community free from the past. As Samuel Wells shows, “To forgive, one must let go of the ways one gives significance to one’s life, of the impulse to control the world to make it right, of the power gained by forgiving without receiving forgiveness.”<sup>38</sup> Our lives are not defined by the cycles of violence that we find ourselves, or even the need to try and overcome death. We forgive because, as the Amish understood, Christ told us to (Matthew 18) and somehow in forgiving we re-enact Christ as he forgives those who do the monstrous to Christ. Also, by forgiving we re-enact Christ overcoming death on the cross.

Death is costly and thus, as L. Gregory Jones writes, “forgiveness is costly, since it involves acknowledging and experiencing the painful truth of human sin and evil at its worst.”<sup>39</sup> Further, “In the midst of such brokenness, God’s forgiveness aims at healing people’s lives and re-creating communion in God’s eschatological Kingdom.”<sup>40</sup> Forgiveness is thus a Trinitarian apocalyptic-political act precisely because it is not bound by the political distinctions made by imperial philosophy. It confesses instead a truer form of political action founded in apocalyptic expectations. It denies the inherent need for animosity among humans, and that a Leviathan has the means to solve the animosity. It announces God’s breaking in “to set us free from the present evil age.”<sup>41</sup> It suspends and goes beyond the standard definition of justice and locates all of humanity as “forgiven sinners.” Thus, it is a therapy of forgiveness rather than a therapy of violence that overcomes evil.

## **Conclusion: At the End of History**

In conclusion, imperial ideology is very much present today. Francis Fukuyama continues the chilling realism of Machiavelli and Hobbes in his publication *The End of History and the Last Man*. In this work, we see

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<sup>38</sup>Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate Into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 1998), 145.

<sup>39</sup>L. Gregory Jones. *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 163.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 163.

<sup>41</sup>Galatians 1:4, New Revised Standard Version.



the continuation of imperial ideology setting up a soteriology of violence and progress. Fukuyama details how the end of history comes. He is referring to the end in a Hegelian sense, claiming that history by means of progress and movement of time comes to an eventual end. This end represents the best possible world we can make. The methods he describes name the usual methods of imperial thought.

Fukuyama writes, "The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. . . . Human life, then, involves a curious paradox: it seems to require injustice, for the struggle against injustice is what calls forth what is highest in man."<sup>42</sup> This is the curious paradox of the psudeo-eternal claim of empire, and the false eschatology and soteriology that empire claims to enact. The wars and blood of history all push toward an end of all wars. The mechanisms of violence are working because the injustices empire uses to face injustice are the "highest" in man. Thus, history's winners are the ones who maintain the status quo, and the losers are those who do not prescribe to these ideologies.

Christians confess, however, that the end of history has already come. The cross and resurrection, as Balthasar has shown, pronounce the end to history's violence.<sup>43</sup> In fact, when understood by the means of the empire, the cross is impossible.<sup>44</sup> We must find ourselves aligned on one side or another in this war of how evil will be overcome. Empire claims we will be seen as history's losers if we do not turn to the side of violence. If we don't yield to the empire, we will be on the side of Christ where history's violence finally finds its defeat. Then it will be as Daniel M. Bell Jr. writes at the conclusion of his response to Fukuyama:

When history's losers, the crucified people, follow in the steps of Jesus and forgive their enemies, they are wagering on God. They are wagering that God is who the Gospel proclaims God to be, the one who defeats sin and wipes away every tear,

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<sup>42</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Free Press, 2006), 311.

<sup>43</sup>Balthasar writes, "Thus on the one hand, a certain preliminary understanding is created upon which Jesus will build. But, on the other hand, the permanent end-time messianism sets up an obstacle to the world's definitive transcendence of itself in the act of liberation at the Cross and in the Resurrection." Hans Urs Von Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in Light of Salvation History." Trans. Erasmo Leiva. *Liberation Theology in Latin America*. Ed. James V. Schall (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 135.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid*, 143.

not with the sword of justice that upholds rights but with the gift of forgiveness in Christ. Fukuyama and his neoconservative cohorts can declare that history has attained its end with the triumph of capitalism because the true end of history remains momentarily fugitive. Although the tomb is empty, the Lamb who is slain has yet to return in final victory. In the meantime, the crucified people, awaiting his return and the consummation of the judgment of grace, refuse to cease suffering.<sup>45</sup>

In essence, the end of history will not come through technology's progression or empire's violence. The wars of history and of empire may rage on, but Christians are called to forgive as Christians are themselves forgiven. Christians can do this because the significance of our lives is not in what anyone can do to them, for their lives cannot be taken from them ultimately. Humanity was not made for strife, but to be caught up in the mutuality in God's Triune life, and accordingly in mutuality with one another. Until that time, we shed tears and bury our dead, but always in the apocalyptic hope of God's continual breaking in.

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<sup>45</sup>Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The refusal to cease suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 195.

# THE FRUITS OF INFERTILITY: PAUL AND THE RHETORIC OF A FERTILE EMPIRE

by

Michelle J. Morris

I will argue that Paul's language related to law and fertility in the letter to the Romans contests the demands of the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea*. Passed in final form in 9 CE, the *Lex Iulia* laws were an effort to legislate the fertility of Roman citizens. The laws included punishments for men and women who did not bear children, including fines, taxes, and restrictions on government involvement. One law allowed women who could bear at least three or four children the right to become their own guardians.

When Paul critiques the law and lifts up infertile Sarah and Abraham as central to the identity of the new Christ-following community, and talks of the importance of being adopted into the family of God, his imagery directly challenges the mandate to bear children in order to be a person of worth and status in Rome. Paul's language is often discussed in metaphorical theological terms, but his inclusion of those who did not bear children as accepted within the Roman congregation may have served a practical evangelistic purpose. I will examine the audiences of Paul's letter, both in his time and through early Christian history. In so doing, I hope to prove that his audience could in fact consist of people who were under the judgment of the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* and that what becomes Christianity provided a space for them that was more accepting than the Roman legal code.

## Paul, the Law, and Women's Concerns

In considering the possibility that Paul's words challenge the Roman legal code in this letter, it is important to examine Paul's understanding of

law in Romans. In the opening chapters, when Paul is identifying characteristics of Jews and Gentiles, his talk of law seems to particularly emphasize Jewish and Gentile relation to law (i.e., Rom. 2:14 and 2:17). In these sections, because there seems to be a tension between Jewish law and Gentile fulfillment of the law, Paul is arguably discussing Torah. However, later in the letter, after he has broadened the Jewish faith to a more universal perspective through the images of Adam and through his proclamation that Abraham is the father of us all, there is a tension instead between God's spiritual law and law of the flesh. Paul proclaimed in 7:6 that followers of Christ are dead to the law. But clearly these followers are not dead to the law of God, but dead to the law of flesh. What is the law of flesh? Perhaps it is Roman law.

In just a few verses before 7:6, Paul has this strange interlude of musing on the law's applicability to a woman who is widowed. In 7:3 Paul notes that, if a widow remarries, she will not be an adulteress. Key to this passage may be the word "if" (7:3). Though it can mean "if" or "when," it carries with it a sense of indefiniteness. *If* or *whenever* she remarries, she will not be an adulteress. However, under Roman law, there was no "if" if she was still of childbearing age; legally she is required to remarry after a short mourning period. In a subtle way, Paul's audience could understand him as challenging Roman law here. Paul underscores this challenge in 7:4 when he notes that followers of Christ have died to the law so that they might bear fruit for God. What law is requiring the bearing of fruit? The *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea*. In this section, Paul's words potentially draw battle lines between a law of the flesh that requires the literal fruit of biological reproduction and God's law that bears the fruit of faith.

The perspective of the audience may determine which law is meant here. When a phrase such as "For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation"<sup>1</sup> was heard, perhaps it matters to individual hearers which law has brought wrath down on them, and which law they are transgressing. An infertile Roman citizen woman, then, who is under the judgment of the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* and is currently transgressing that law because she is not able to bear children, might not care about Paul's concept of law, but instead finds in his letter a space to

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<sup>1</sup>Rom. 4:15 NRSV.

critique the Roman law that is oppressing her. In the mind of such a woman, Paul is allowing space for resistance to law.

Paul's use of Abraham and Sarah also provides a space of resistance by standing in the relationship between physical and metaphorical reproduction. As William Baird reminds us, Abraham in the New Testament must be understood in light of Abraham in Jewish tradition. "Most important, Abraham was recognized as father—the progenitor of Israel, the ancestor of the people of God."<sup>2</sup> Abraham is "our ancestor according to the flesh"<sup>3</sup> whose ancestral line is now opening to the whole of humanity. Such logic is not only filled with grace; it is also a direct challenge to the Roman identity, and the Roman state in particular. Neil Elliott proposes Abraham as a foil to the rhetoric of the Roman empire by proposing him as "a rival ancestor for the nations. . . ."<sup>4</sup> In order to represent an ancestor, and to truly challenge the rhetoric of fertility posited by the Roman empire, Abraham must first be Jew and then also Greek, to paraphrase 1:16. In other words, Abraham's physical procreative power must be upheld to truly come up against a Roman identity that is positing itself as the pinnacle of civilization. Then, that ancestry becomes only all the more threatening in being able to reproduce metaphorically as well as physically. In a sense, Abraham is the seed replacing the Roman empire.

Sarah also plays an important part in Paul's argument. Her appearance in Romans 4 marks the arrival of female reproduction as her dead womb<sup>5</sup> is paired with Abraham's dead body in creating the children of the promise. Then, in 9:9-10, the sons are born to women, Sarah and Rebecca. Making the women the prominent parent certainly challenges the patriline of Rome. In Roman society in which the mother's contribution to the genetic mix was sometimes viewed as foreign and in need of repression, lifting up the roles of Sarah and Rebekah is counter-cultural indeed. Sarah and Rebekah are also important figures for barren women. At this time women who could bear children were gaining more independence by becoming their own guardians through the right of three

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<sup>2</sup>William Baird, "Abraham in the New Testament: Tradition and the New Identity," *Interpretation* 42, no. 4 (Oct 1998): 368.

<sup>3</sup>Romans 4:1.

<sup>4</sup>Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 128.

<sup>5</sup>Rom. 4:19 BNT. Literally a womb put to death, not barrenness as the NRSV translates it.

children. As a result, women who could bear children were privileged above the barren in legal rights. Sarah and Rebecca, as barren women (or women who can only bear one or two children), serve as representatives for the women who are denied these new rights.

Such feminist concerns point to the importance of not focusing solely on the physical here. The metaphorical understanding of family is just as important in Romans. Because Paul is interpreting Abraham's promise of being a father of all nations as being sort of an adoptive father to the Gentiles, physical descent is not *the* determining factor in the covenant with God. Following in the promise of Abraham, and claiming Jesus as Lord (10:9), are what is required now. Stanley Stowers points out that there remains a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but they share a common place in two ways: "First, Abraham is the father of both the descendants by his blood and also those by adoption through incorporation into Abraham's blood descendant, Christ. Second, both peoples are expected to share in and live out Abraham's faithfulness."<sup>6</sup> The Jews may find themselves in this line in a physical way (also represented by the physical existence of the Torah), but the Gentiles can also step into this line through the promise given to Abraham. Since we know from chapter 4 that God is faithful to promises, and that God can bring existence where there is none, God can also bring Gentiles into the promise. God can do this through the process of adoption.

### **Paul's Use of Adoptive Language**

Paul focuses on adoption in chapters 8 and 9. Adoption is representative of all those who are in the covenant, which first belonged to the Jews, but now belongs to the children of the promise (which can include both Jews and Gentiles). Adoption as a concept is acting in eschatological terms here in marking the step when both the Jews and the Gentiles are coming into the covenant. Arguably by Paul's own logic, however, since to Israel belongs the adoption, the redemption of bodies will be both Jew and Gentile, both literal and metaphorical seed. We need only hope (8:24-25) and await the revealing for this pattern to be fulfilled—for both literal and metaphorical seed to be part of the adoption.

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<sup>6</sup>Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 243. It should be noted that Stowers implies Jesus to be Abraham's one descendant, but in so doing he is importing Galatians into Romans without necessary cause.

Paul's positive use of adoptive language serves as a significant critique. If everyone can be adopted into a relationship with God, but Roman citizenship is focused on fertile literal procreation, God's *paterfamilias* turns out to be far more inclusive than the Roman *pater patriae*. The implications of the dual sense with which Paul interprets the seed of Abraham—as both literal and metaphorical—is potentially seditious from two directions.

First, Paul does not deny the validity of the literal seed of Abraham as the path into the covenant for Jews. This understanding is as it has always been and, as God is faithful to this covenant, the people are encouraged to be so as well. From the perspective of the Roman empire, however, Rome is not interested in the procreation of possible foreigners (and perhaps particularly the troublesome Jews who have only recently been allowed back into Rome following the Claudian edict). Foreign blood only serves as a temptation to lead the Roman elite class astray. If Abraham is also understood as a challenge to the ancestral line of Rome, as Elliott proposes, then this interpretation is nothing short of seditious.

Second, Paul does not encourage everyone to partake in the literal line of the seed of Abraham. For the Gentile converts, the promise of the covenant has opened through the metaphorical reproduction of faith. Gentiles need only the faith of/in Jesus, and to proclaim Jesus as Lord, to have access to the covenant. Gentiles are thus also released of the pressure to procreate to participate in the faith at the same time that they recognize a ruling authority other than Caesar. In Rome, this understanding potentially affects Roman citizens who may be subject to the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea*. Thus, Paul's theology releases Gentile Roman citizens from having to bear children at all. What will become Christianity is here revolting against the concept that covenants (and potentially *paterfamilias* and citizenships) must be passed through literal heredity. Therein lies the offense against the empire. When literal descent serves to undergird the political, reproduction and familial status become sites of either collusion with or resistance to the state. This letter of Paul's allows people space to resist the empire's reproductive demands.

### **Citizenship: Roman and Christian**

In order for this resistance to have any impetus, however, Paul's letter would need to be heard by Roman citizens. Did the Roman congregation include them? Perhaps the most important evidence for the specific

makeup of his Roman audience is found in the list of greetings in Chapter 16.<sup>7</sup> Mentioned in this chapter are a number of women and men with both Greek and Latin names, but Romanness itself was by that time a blended identity in many ways, integrating much of Greek identity into itself. There are people of significant means, particularly since Paul believes they can finance his trip to Spain. Some of the women mentioned hold positions of prominence. For instance, when Prisca and Aquila are mentioned, it is notable that the wife's name precedes the husband, implying that she has a higher social standing than her husband, either in class or in importance to the Roman community.<sup>8</sup> The Roman congregation was probably blended both ethnically and across class. What is unknown, however, is whether they are citizens. Citizenship is a determining factor in whether the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* applies to them or not. Therefore, it is important to consider how widespread Roman citizenship was at this time to consider the possibility that such citizens might be part of the Roman Christ-followers.

By the end of the Roman Republic, Italians had been granted Roman citizenship.<sup>9</sup> Also by the reign of Claudius, those who had served in the military 25 years were granted citizenship.<sup>10</sup> If we take the Book of Acts as evidence, then Paul himself was a diasporic Roman citizen. At least at this point in Jewish and Christian history, there is no necessary incompatibility between being a Jew or a Christ-follower and being a Roman citizen. Certainly, then, those who lived in Rome and could claim Italian ancestry, or those who had inherited citizenship from their parents could worship in the Roman congregation and carry their citizenship at the

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<sup>7</sup>When confronting this section of the letter, it is important first to discuss the twentieth-century tendency to question the validity of this list in Romans. For much of that century, a case was made based on textual variants that chapter 16 either belonged elsewhere in Romans or belonged in Ephesians instead. Esler (116) outlines the reasons for rejecting this argument: the greetings are too formal in tone to be addressed to a congregation with which Paul was familiar (i.e., Ephesus), too many of those named lack the personal details Paul would have shared had he ever worked with them, and Paul does not reference his past work among them. Additionally, the sheer number of names mentioned suggests that Paul is laying the groundwork for support for his mission to Spain.

<sup>8</sup>Sandra Hack Polaski, *A Feminist Introduction to Paul* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 45.

<sup>9</sup>Martin Goodman, *The Roman World: 44 BC—AD 180* (London: Routledge, 1997), 100.

<sup>10</sup>Goodman, 118.



same time. It is certainly likely, then, that the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* applied to hearers of Paul's letter to the Romans. This is why I have focused on Romans rather than including other Pauline letters for this paper.

It may also be important to note that none of these people in the list (with the exception of the mother of Rufus) are mentioned as having children. It could be a detail that was unimportant or uncommon in letter greetings at the time, or it could be indicative of their barrenness, particularly when considering the number of women listed here who are not defined by their motherhood, their expected role of the time. It could also indicate the counter-cultural nature of early Christ communities, which lifted up women for their roles as apostles, deacons, and patrons rather than for their procreative ability.

It is one thing to talk of Roman citizenship in Paul's day, and quite another to speak of it in the late second and early third centuries. By 212 CE, Roman citizenship was, for all intents and purposes, universal across the empire.<sup>11</sup> With universal citizenship came universal applicability of laws, and the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* remained on the books as a tool for emperors to periodically enforce to increase revenue and wield power. At the same time that citizenship was spreading, so was Christianity. Paul's letters had been bundled together and were serving an unofficial canonical purpose of defining and supporting proto-orthodoxy. In the Muratorian Canon (mid-second century, possibly in Rome), the Canon of Origen of Alexandria (early third century), the Canon of Eusebius of Caesarea (311 AD), the Canon of Athanasius of Alexandria (367 AD), and the Canon of the Third Synod of Carthage (397 AD), Paul's letters are all mentioned as authoritative for the Christian communities they discuss. The letter to the Romans, then, is being used side-by-side with the first letter to the Corinthians throughout the empire to assert the value of a dead womb, adoption into the family of God, and the decision to live a celibate life. At least until the reign of Constantine, such claims were at the very least illegal, if not simply viewed as strange.

We do know that Christian women and men across the empire chose to live lives that did not result in the production of children. The status of *univira* (a widow who had only married once), a value supported in Roman culture even if the *Lex Iulia* made such a lifestyle illegal (at least

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<sup>11</sup>Goodman, 9.

for women of childbearing age), became highly valued in some Christian communities. Widows and virgins were accorded special roles in Christian communities, especially those that tended to value leadership of women.<sup>12</sup> Women may have been able to find a place in Christianity where they might be able to experience some autonomy, without having to bear three or four children to do so. This fact alone might be reason enough for conversion to Christianity.

### **The Barren Who Yet Belong**

Practical concerns of women probably drove many women to pursue a “barren” existence. Women who would not want to risk their lives by bearing children could find in virginity a new purpose. Also, women who had tried to bear children and had been unable to do so might find either a celibate marriage or a second virginity in widowhood meaningful. Women who chose an ascetic Christian lifestyle might have found themselves outside of the mores of the society at large, but they were welcomed into this new community. The barren by biology, by widowhood, and by choice could all find purpose beyond their reproductive (in)capacity.

As Christian theology continued to be developed, more women would choose virginity. There was an acknowledged explosion of asceticism in the fourth century. Typically, this trend is credited to the legality of Christianity in the empire, as asceticism replaced martyrdom as a means to show devotion to God. It is rarely mentioned, however, that Constantine lifted the punitive aspects of the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* against both the infertile and celibate in 320 CE.<sup>13</sup> From Constantine’s perspective, in light of making Christianity important to the empire, he needed to legalize this significant aspect of the faith. From the perspective of women in the Roman empire, however, the abolition of these punishments allowed more women to freely choose an ascetic lifestyle. While

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<sup>12</sup>Tertullian was critical of communities who accorded equal status to widows and virgins. His point was that virgins had not earned this place of esteem. Nonetheless, since he is able to critique such practices, these practices must have been prevalent. See Charlotte Methuen, “The ‘Virgin Widow’: A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?” *Harvard Theological Review* 90, No. 3 (July 1997): 289-90.

<sup>13</sup>James A. Field, Jr., “The Purpose of the *Lex Iulia et Papia Poppea*,” *The Classical Journal* 40, No. 7 (April 1945), 409.

women who were infertile would no longer be punished by these laws, they might still have found significant prejudice in society. With the punitive aspects against celibacy and infertility lifted, though, they were at least legally able to choose this purposeful lifestyle. Asceticism is not solely influenced by theology, but by social pressures as well, and as the pressures began to be lifted, the theology had more room for expression. Women had more reproductive choice in the matter as well, thanks to a foundation begun by the letters of Paul, particularly Romans.

# **WHEN THE EMPIRE DOES NOT STRIKE BACK: READING JONAH IN LIGHT OF EMPIRE**

by

**Stephen Patrick Riley**

I have one simple goal, to show how a reading of three motifs found in the book of Jonah might help create a critical stance that can be a starting place for undermining some of the effects of empire which I believe influence relations between groups on either side of the imperial divide. To accomplish this goal I will do three things. First, I will reflect on the book of Jonah and its relationship to imperial contexts, both ancient and contemporary. Second, I will propose a reading of Jonah that highlights the three motifs. Finally, I will offer an interpretation of the motifs in relation to contemporary imperial contexts that I hope will offer a way to begin the hard work of healing and reconciliation between isolated groups.

## **Imperial Contexts and the Book of Jonah**

Let me explain what I mean by “imperial context.” I have in mind two imperial contexts, the one in which the book of Jonah was produced and the one in which we read the book today. Thus, the words “empire” and “imperialism” have a number of different definitions in scholarly parlance; however, as Edward Said remarked in his work, *Culture and Imperialism*, the concept of empire basically has to do with the control of land.<sup>1</sup> In this understanding, imperialism is a relationship between two

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<sup>1</sup>Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 93.

groups of people where one group holds control over the land and political sovereignty of another, often a smaller group. It is this understanding of empire and imperialism which I believe influences the production of the book of Jonah, as I will later explain.

However, while this basic notion of empire and imperialism would hold true for a number of past contexts, it has less effect in the contemporary context. Today there are fewer explicit examples of colonialism's forced control of another's land such as the ones found in the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires of the ancient Near East, Roman imperialism, and the colonialism of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. That is not to say there are not lasting effects of such colonialism or that there are not some examples of land-driven imperialism; it is just that, in our contemporary context, another and broader definition of empire and imperialism has developed. What many theoreticians of empire have suggested recently is that imperialism is best seen in the influence that super economic powers have over others. This type of power imbalance is employed by enticing others to do their bidding and establishing social norms. In this case, imperialism is not so much the control over land in the sense of a colonizer/colonized relationship, but rather it is a relationship where economic and societal influence is exercised in pervasive ways. As Joerg Rieger remarks, "Empire, in sum, has to do with massive concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life and that cannot be controlled by one actor. . . . The problem with empire has to do with the forms of top-down control that are established on the backs of the empire's subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes."<sup>2</sup>

At this broader level, imperialism pervades all aspects of life creating divisions among members of the empire based on ethnicity, economic status, education, and religious affiliation. These divisions create an imperial divide where members of the group in power work to maintain their status by isolating themselves from those different from themselves. In order to keep this distance, the other is often dehumanized and stereotyped. Additionally, the language of God enters the description of this imperial relational situation as members of the power group often claim exclusivity to God in order to justify their actions. This breakdown of

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<sup>2</sup>Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 2-3.

relationships is the result of the imperial context I wish to later explore as a contemporary location for the rereading of the book of Jonah.

The book of Jonah contains one of the most fascinating narratives in the Old Testament. Most people know it as the story of the runaway prophet who spends time in the belly of the big fish. Others have focused on the theme of God's care for all creation, including the animals of Nineveh, and God's willingness to respond to repentance. While there is no consensus about the main thrust of the short story, there is a general recognition that the people who produced the work did so in an imperial context.

Although some of the earliest interpretations of the book attempted to place the book's writing in the time of Jeroboam II, based on the reference to Jonah son of Amittai in 2 Kings 14:25, more recent publications argue that the book was most likely produced in the Persian period of mid-sixth to mid-fourth century B.C.E., long after the Assyrian empire had ceased to exist.<sup>3</sup> Yet, if such a dating is accepted, one must recognize the long history of imperial influences on Judah and on those who would have produced the work. As Lowell Handy argues for his dating of the book to the Persian period, "It provides a time when . . . there is an empire that can be compared to and taken as a continuation of the Assyrian world empire, and the events of both Assyria's demise and Babylonian incorporation into the Persian Empire were well in the past and yet still of interest to the intellectual circles." My point here is not so much to argue for an acceptance of a particular dating of the book, but rather to show that, no matter at what point one places the work, the influence of larger empires such as Assyria, Babylon, and Persia would have shaped the construction of the book and the import of its message.

In light of such imperial influence on those who put the book of Jonah together, the literary feature that stands out to many as most peculiar is the fact that a great city of one of the largest and cruelest empires of the ancient world repents when confronted with its possible destruction. While many have recognized the somewhat satirical nature of the book of Jonah,

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<sup>3</sup>See the discussions of the possible contexts for the writing of the book in Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah* (AB 24B; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 20-27; Lowell K. Handy, *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story* (London: Equinox, 2007), 1-41; and Ehud Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (JSOTSup 367; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 99-115.

the fact is important that those writing the story can imagine an empire repenting and not striking back when called out for its evil. As Louis Stulman and H. C. Paul Kim suggest in their writing on Jonah, the feature of having the king of a ruthless and foreign empire repent and worship YHWH is “a subversive drama that stirs a vision of hope for the community stripped of power and meaning. This vision reimagines abusive power structures: it refuses to accept them as normative, it denies them the last word, and it affirms that the true king ultimately tames them.”<sup>4</sup>

If the ancient writers can imagine a world where empires are repentant and the common denominator of the story is that both colonizer and colonized have a new-found and shared identity, then one might ask if, in our own context, one could read Jonah and not just imagine such a world but also begin the hard work of seeing such a vision come to realization. I propose that this is possible and necessary if we are to overcome the forces of imperialism at work in our culture. These forces separate groups into various camps and keep them from engaging in creative and collaborative work for change. I offer now a reading of Jonah that could help establish a critical stance toward others, regardless of which side of the imperial divide they might fall, one that could enable us to begin such types of liberating work.

### Three Motifs in the Book of Jonah

Ehud Ben Zvi, one of the more perceptive recent interpreters of the book of Jonah, has said that part of the beauty of the book is its ability to be read and reread in a number of contexts. He also argues that within that diversity there are a certain number of limitations on the way in which Jonah can be read. He argues this point based on belief that there are certain sign posts in the narrative which shape the ways in which it can be read.<sup>5</sup> Since the narrative is structured with certain limitations, I want to focus on three motifs that I see at play throughout the story. These motifs are: (1) the movement from isolation to engagement for Jonah as the story progresses, (2) the interplay between characters who know and don’t know what is going to happen in the story, and (3) the relational character of God with all members in the story.

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<sup>4</sup>Louis Stulman & H. C. Paul Kim, *You are My People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 193.

<sup>5</sup>Ben Zvi, *Signs*, 129-154.

**Motif #1.** In the book of Jonah, the narrative progresses by way of a series of movements from isolation to engagement on the part of the prophet. There are three such movements that shape the way the narrative can be viewed.

The first moment of isolation occurs near the beginning of the story. The very first thing that Jonah does following his call from YHWH is leave in the opposite direction, fleeing from the presence of the Lord (1:3). In this one small verse, the reader is told that, as soon as Jonah hears the word of YHWH, he gets up to flee in the direction of Tarshish, the anti-pole of Nineveh, and goes away from the presence of the Lord.<sup>6</sup> The repetition of the phrase “away from the presence of YHWH” emphasizes the isolating nature of Jonah’s movement. Additionally, as Jonah is fleeing from YHWH, it is clear from the descriptive language used that all his movement is in a direction opposite of others. Numerous times Jonah is said to go “down.” He goes down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the inner part of the ship to go to sleep (1:3-5). In quick succession, Jonah isolates himself from YHWH, his call to the people of Nineveh, and the sailors on the ship. It is not until the terrible storm nearly destroys the ship and crew that Jonah comes up from his seclusion. It is only at this point, when Jonah is engaged in dialogue with the sailors, that the narrative can move forward and the crew of the ship is able to be saved.

The second incident of isolation occurs after Jonah has been discovered by the sailors on the ship. Here, in the course of their questions, the sailors determine that the storm has come upon them because Jonah is “fleeing” from YHWH. When they ask Jonah what they should do to cause the sea to stop, Jonah replies that they should throw him into the water. While the sailors do everything in their power to avoid doing this to Jonah, his request is finally heeded and Jonah again finds himself isolated from others. Jonah is thrown into the water, swallowed by a large fish, and spends three days and three nights in the belly alone. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah prays to YHWH. Even in this engagement, the language that permeates the prayer is that of “being cast off,” “driven away,” “dragged down,” and “swallowed” by the sea. This last word is particularly important. It only occurs in four other verses in

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<sup>6</sup>For possible locations, see Handy, *Jonah’s World*, 27-31; Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah*, 79-80.



the Old Testament and in each case the theme of isolation from God and other humans is prevalent.<sup>7</sup> In this prayer, Jonah's isolation in the belly of the fish becomes symbolic of the isolation of those who have experienced separation from their homeland and cannot return. Within the narrative, it is only after he engages YHWH and prays that Jonah is spit out on dry land and given a second chance to go to Nineveh.

The final occurrence of the motif of isolation takes place after Jonah has proclaimed YHWH's message in Nineveh and the city has repented. The movement of the narrative between isolation and engagement occurs in close sequence. Chapter 4 begins with the words, "And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil. It caused him to be angry." Jonah prays again, but this time he asks that YHWH take his life and separate him from everyone ultimately. YHWH then asks Jonah about the appropriateness of his anger. Instead of responding to the question, Jonah once again goes out from God's presence. Jonah goes out of the city and sits down to wait and see what will happen to it. It is not until after the object lesson of the quiquayon plant, where YHWH re-engages Jonah in a dialogue of difficult questions and answers, that the narrative can have its important conclusion.

**Motif #2.** The second motif is the interplay between knowing and not knowing what is going to happen. Throughout the narrative there is an important contrast between those who seem to know what is going to take place and those who have an openness to being surprised by what might happen. There are three main instances which highlight this motif.

The first instance occurs in chapter 1 as Jonah is brought forth from his slumber in the hold of the ship. In verse 6 the captain declares to him, "What is it to you sleepy one? Get up call on your god! Perhaps the god will be caused to think of us so that we will not die." In the midst of the stormy chaos, the captain implores Jonah to join the mariners' openness to being surprised by a reversal of circumstances. In the mouth of the captain, the author has placed an important phrase which picks up on a theme found elsewhere in scripture. The word translated as "perhaps" from the Hebrew word is also significant in the narrative of Abraham's bargaining with YHWH for Sodom in Genesis 18. Abraham repeatedly asks YHWH if "perhaps" a certain number of righteous are found in the city, could the city be saved. In both cases, the word creates an open

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel 22:5; Psalms 18:5, 40:13, and 116:3.

space for the possibility for being surprised by what happens next. Will God think of the sailors and save them? Will there be enough righteous people in the city to avert its destruction? The speakers of this small word create a large space for something unexpected to happen.

The second instance of this motif occurs after Jonah has proclaimed YHWH's message to the people of Nineveh. Upon hearing the report, the king of Nineveh declares that everyone will fast and repent from the least to the greatest. The reason he gives for making such a proclamation comes in 3:9: "Who knows, the God might turn and have pity and turn from his anger so that we will not die." Again, the author places a crucial phrase in the mouth of one of the characters in the story. Much like the previous example, the phrase "who knows" occurs in another important context. In the narrative of 2 Samuel 12, when David and Bathsheba's first child is struck with illness, David fasts and prays for the child. Although the child dies, in the mouth of David the author of the narrative in 2 Samuel acknowledges the possibility that something could have changed. In the mouth of both kings, the phrase acknowledges the possibility that God may respond to repentance and the announced destruction might still be averted. One cannot predetermine what will happen and must at least have openness to the possibility of being surprised.

The final occurrence of this motif takes place after Jonah sees that the city has repented. Here in Jonah's prayer we see the antithesis of the previous two examples. He prays, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was in my own land? This is why I ran to flee to Tarshish! For I know that you are a gracious and compassionate god, slow to anger, great in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing." Jonah seems to know exactly how God will act. Though this is a confession about YHWH found in other places in the Old Testament, the problematic nature of Jonah's response is that he has no openness to the possibilities of how God might act in the situation. Unlike the captain of the boat and the king of Nineveh, Jonah's language articulates an understanding of the situation as being predetermined. There was no "perhaps" for him in the story, no room for the possibility of something surprising happening.

**Motif #3.** The last motif in the book of Jonah is the final identity of all the characters in the story. One can see that every major character, or group of characters, ends up in relationship with YHWH. Three particular examples of this motif in the book are important for this discussion.

The first example occurs in the scene on the boat headed for Tarshish. God sends a mighty storm against the ship designed to turn Jonah back toward Nineveh. In the process of determining their course of action, the sailors begin to cast lots, pray to YHWH, and finally make vows and sacrifices. In a recent article, Brent Strawn has shown how this transformation has explicit Israelite overtones and is intended to show a shift in the sailors' religious orientation.<sup>8</sup> By the end of their scene in the narrative, they have become worshippers of YHWH.

The second example of this motif can be seen in the people of Nineveh. The story begins with God's word coming to Jonah to get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim that destruction is coming because the city's evil has come up before YHWH. By the end of the narrative, the whole city, from the least to the greatest, has not only heard YHWH's message but has repented, fasted, and prayed to God in hope of averting disaster. The Ninevehites have responded to the word of the Lord in the proper Israelite fashion. The last we see of the people of Nineveh is a picture of them all worshipping YHWH.

The final example of God being in relationship with everyone in the narrative is Jonah. Jonah has often been portrayed as the reluctant, runaway, and disobedient prophet. However, throughout the narrative one thing Jonah cannot escape is his relationship with YHWH. Despite his best efforts to go the opposite direction and avoid proclaiming God's message to Nineveh, YHWH continues to work with and through Jonah. After the city repents and Jonah goes out on the east side of the city, YHWH comes and meets Jonah and engages in a dialogue about what has made Jonah angry. When Jonah refuses to respond, YHWH sends a plant for shade to engage Jonah in an object lesson. The final few verses of the book highlight the fact that YHWH continues to dialogue with Jonah even as Jonah continues to be angry about the situation in which he finds himself. In the end, Jonah cannot escape being in a relationship with YHWH.

### **The Three Motifs in Light of the Contemporary Imperial Context**

I have tried to show how one reading of the book of Jonah highlights three motifs which are crucial to the book's narrative outlook. I also have

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<sup>8</sup>Brent A. Strawn, "Jonah's Sailors and Their Lot Casting: A Rhetorical-Critical Observation," *Biblica* 91 (2010): 66-76.

argued that the book of Jonah was produced in a particular imperial context in which the author/s attempted to subvert the power of the empire by imagining a world where the empire of their day, represented by the Assyrian city of Nineveh, did not strike back when confronted with its evil, but rather repented and worshipped YHWH. Furthermore, I have argued that in our contemporary context, one of imperialism's main effects can be seen in the way in which diverse groups find themselves isolated from one another based on ethnic, economic, and religious affiliations. I now want to offer an interpretation of the three motifs in order to provide a critical stance for the way those on both sides of the imperial divide might begin the subversive work of reconciliation and healing which I believe is part of the work of envisioning a world where imperial forces do not have the last word in our lives. The three motifs from the book of Jonah highlight three dangers that are apparent in our current imperial context.

The first motif brings to the front the danger of believing that isolation rather than engagement is our best protection. If we are to imagine and work for a world where the imperial forces of our day do not have the final word, then we cannot allow the forces of fear to keep us from engaging one another, no matter how different we may be. In our contemporary context, the globalization of communication has not overcome the separation that one sees in neighborhoods, school districts, and churches where homogenous groups often gather together and rarely interact with the other groups. If the story of Jonah cannot find its fulfillment until Jonah has moved from isolation to engagement, we too must emerge from our isolation to come together and hear one another in an attempt to break down the barriers that keep us from seeking new ways of living together. Rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the trap of thinking that isolation is our best protection, we must seek to engage the other in an attempt to undermine the pervasive forces of fear and dehumanization. As Miguel De La Torre remarks, the most important factor in the work of healing comes as members of both groups cross the imperial divide and recognize the difficult situation they face in overcoming racism, classism, and sexism.<sup>9</sup> By encountering the other, a face can be put on the faceless and the work of healing can have a space to begin.

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<sup>9</sup>A. De La Torre, *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation* (New York: Orbis, 2007), 123-147.

The second motif highlights the danger of believing one already knows how someone is going to respond. In a context where fear of the other controls our relations, one of the effects is the belief that we know exactly how another group of people is going to respond in a particular situation. This determined understanding of how others will respond serves to keep us isolated and removes any room for new possibilities in our relations with one another. In contrast to this way of engaging, the motif of not knowing in Jonah can help us create a “perhaps” attitude in our relations with those who are different from ourselves. Having such an orientation of openness to the possibility of being positively surprised can create a space in our relationships where creative work can be done and healing can begin.

The third motif emphasizes the danger of one side claiming God for their purposes alone. The rhetoric of empire is often accompanied by language which suggests that God is somehow on the side of one particular group, generally those in power. However, the motif of God’s relational character with all creation reminds us that no one can lay hold of the claim to God exclusively. In the book of Jonah, each of the main characters in the narrative ends up sharing the identity of worshipper of YHWH. As Daniel Timmer reminds us in his post-colonial study of the book of Jonah, “By identifying its human characters primarily in terms of their relationship to YHWH, who alone rules the entire cosmos, the book puts all humanity on equal footing before him.”<sup>10</sup> This equal footing before God reminds us that no one can claim God for their actions, particularly if those actions will oppress and isolate some other group. As Nineveh’s evil went up before YHWH, so too our evil will need to be confronted when we allow notions of God’s special favor to help us isolate and dehumanize another group based on the characteristics that we believe separate us. Instead, if we can begin from the standpoint that God desires relationship with all humanity, we can forge an important starting point for the work of healing and reconciliation.

## Conclusion

By identifying and interpreting the three motifs lying at the heart of the book of Jonah, I have tried to show how they can help create for us a

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<sup>10</sup>Daniel Timmer, “The Intertextual Israelite Jonah *Face A L’Empire*: The Post-Colonial Significance of the Book’s Contexts and Purported Neo-Assyrian Context,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009): 19-20.

new critical stance toward relations with “others.” As a member of a Wesleyan tradition, I am particularly interested in creating this type of stance as a part of the church’s larger mission in the world. Since our tradition is marked by a great diversity across ethnic and socio-economic factors, we are continually wrestling with how we might more authentically reflect the kingdom of God in this world.

Unfortunately, too often even within our local churches, members find themselves on different sides of the imperial divide. We must recognize that there are those who benefit from the structures of our imperial context and those who suffer as a result of it. Yet we claim that we are one body in Christ Jesus. However, as different ethnic and socio-economic groups attempt to worship together, the imperial forces of fear and isolation raise their heads. Perhaps those on both sides of the imperial divide can begin from a point of understanding that in God’s economy we have a shared identity.

By working to come together rather than retreating to isolation, we can learn from each another how the effects of our modern imperialism have forced us into unfair and biased opinions. By approaching the other with a “perhaps” attitude which opens a space for surprise and new possibilities, we can shed the shallow stereotypes of how we expect certain groups to act. By remembering that God cannot be exclusively claimed by either side of the imperial divide, those who find themselves dominated by the culture of fear created by the contemporary imperial context can begin to engage one another from a new standpoint and start the difficult work of creating a world where the empire does not have the final say in our lives and, therefore, will not strike back.

# CONFRONTING THE HOUSEHOLD GODS: THE CHURCH'S FAMILY AS THE BASIC POLITICAL UNIT

by

Mary C. Moorman

We begin by noting the obvious. Conservative Christians in the contemporary milieu fiercely champion “the traditional family.” Such a defensive posture reflects an emphatic reliance on the biological family as the very center of God’s purposes and work on behalf of the world.<sup>1</sup> In the words of the contemporary theologian R. J. Rushdoony, “God’s dominion is extended in the world through the biological family, which is essential to the life of the church, state, (culture), and every phase of life . . . but in its primary assignment and orientation, (God’s dominion) is given to the family. The central area of dominion is . . . , the family under God.”<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, contemporary theologians who are concerned with bolstering a more robust ecclesiology for our times stand with Stanley Hauerwas and Rodney Clapp in urging as follows:

I have tried to remind Christians that for us the family is constituted by a quite different politic from the world . . . in particular, I have objected to the view of some Christians that the greatest virtue of Christianity is the bulwark it supposedly pro-

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<sup>1</sup>Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>2</sup>John Rousas Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), qtd. Clapp, 68.

vides for some form of defense of the family. That seems to me to be nothing short of idolatrous. After all, Christianity has been and will continue to be, if we are serious as Christians, a challenge to familial loyalties.<sup>3</sup>

These theologians thus consider evangelicalism's particular glorification of the family to be the last great stronghold of pagan family idolatry.<sup>4</sup> They insist that, just as the Christian must admit that the first social responsibility is owed to the church rather than to the state,<sup>5</sup> so must the Christian regard family loyalties as relativized under the over-riding loyalty demanded by Christ and his family, the church.<sup>6</sup> Thus, recovering the lost art of the truly Christian family requires two radical declarations. First, the family is not God's most important institution on earth, nor the social agent that most significantly shapes and forms Christians. Second, the family is not the primary vehicle of God's grace and salvation for the needy world. Christians must instead affirm positively that it is the church that is God's most important institution on earth, the social agent that produces and forms Christians for Christ, and the primary vehicle for God's grace and salvation.<sup>7</sup> By extension, Christians must form their families as secondary institutions that are oriented to the service of the church.

In short, the human household must be relativized under the reign of God's household. With Hauerwas, I will argue here that apparent tensions between church and family may be resolved by a more robust ecclesiological construal of the Christian family as the church's family and agent, whose significance is derived from the family of God,<sup>8</sup> and whose value

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, "The Radical Hope of the Annunciation: Why Both Single and Married Christians Welcome Children," in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 511.

<sup>4</sup>Clapp, 12.

<sup>5</sup>Clapp, 12.

<sup>6</sup>In as much as I write as a Roman Catholic, the reader will find that my references to the church presuppose the kind of universal and hierarchical community that forms and governs its constituent families with a certain degree of defined consensus, and within a certain organizational framework; this presupposition is not entirely antithetical to the Protestant construal of the spiritual union of local ecclesial communities.

<sup>7</sup>Clapp, 68.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Selby emphasizes that it has always been the missionary purpose of the church that has grounded and determined the basis for "fellowship" within the church. Peter Selby, "Is the Church a Family?" in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 87.



is understood relative to its contribution to the mission of that primary family.<sup>9</sup>

### Various Construals of Family

While lamenting the church's supposed neglect of the family, as evidenced by "the diminishing of patriarchal structures"<sup>10</sup> in modern culture, some modes of contemporary ecclesiology express their construal of the relationship between the church and the family as follows. First, the church is viewed as being somehow derived from the family: "minimize the father and the family will perish. Minimize the family and you have neutralized the church."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, similar authors continue: "Rediscovering the biblical concept of patriarchy is a first attempt in counter-ing...dysfunctional cultural values. The godly family is the foundation of the social order; God created the family first, and then out of the family came the state and the church."<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars have elaborated on the family as the "basic political unit" in pagan cultures, where the Roman *domus*, as ruled by the

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<sup>9</sup>Hauerwas urges for a perspective of Christian family life as "derived" from the primary community of the church relative to marriage, the bedrock of the family: "accordingly, the love required of Christians even in marriage imitates that love discovered (first) through our brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, marriage is not for Christians where we learn what love is about; rather marriage is made possible for Christians because we have been loved by God. Stanley Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 225.

<sup>10</sup>"While one cannot really yet call it a 'movement,' the term 'patriarchy' has made a return describing an attempt to develop a counter-cultural model of the Christian family and by extension, a just Christian social order." "Biblical Patriarchy and the Doctrine of Federal Representation," Brian M. Abshire for the International Institute for Christian Culture, accessed May 2011, <http://christiancivilization.org/articles/biblical-patriarchy-and-the-doctrine-of-federal-representation>. The link between an idealized patriarchal family structure and a desirable social order, within Abshire's proposal, is further explained as follows: "now what has all this to do with reforming the Christian family and evaluating 'Patriarchy?' In effect, Western civilization was a 'patriarchy' up until recent times and assumed as the normal means of governing not only households, but also entire nations. The English proverb 'every man's home is his castle' represents the cultural assumption, handed down from antiquity, that the father, as head of his household, was the federal representative of his own family to the broader community." Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

absolutely powerful *paterfamilias*, constituted “part of the natural order, the basic unit of society, upon which the city, and ultimately the state was built.”<sup>13</sup> Cicero had already established that the family was “the seed bed of the state,” an essential political institution that mediated between the individual and the larger society in the Stoic worldview. In summary, we recall Cicero’s view that “in essence the household was a miniature ‘state’ over which the father ruled, its unity and harmony ensuring the well-being of the state.”<sup>14</sup>

At this point, we note that there is a glaring disjuncture between such social goals, which implicate the family as existing for its own sake and the sake of the coercive nation, and the mandates of the crucified and risen Christ. The Christian confesses that it is Christ who is the King of Kings, to whom ultimate political allegiance is owed. Furthermore, the Christian confesses that this King entered His world to seek and to serve by the outpouring of His own life, and promised His kingdom not to the mighty and many but to the meek, the poor, and the pure. If Christians are resigned to the follow the state’s urging to build their families as political units on the state-making principles of Cicero, while ignoring their political identity under their heavenly King and His church, a revised vision for the Christian’s family re-construal under Christ must be needed.

### King Jesus’ “Basic Political Unit”

“The church, the harbinger of the kingdom of God, is now the source of our primary loyalty.”<sup>15</sup> Though Christians readily accept the family’s legitimate sanctity to the extent that the church has so recognized, any attempt to establish a Christian’s primary allegiance to the family as a central locus of authority, or as a localized “kingdom” in the lives of Christians, simply does not align with the historic confessions of Christianity, in which it is the church which is “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Selby, 151.

<sup>14</sup>Carol Harrison here cites Cicero, *On Duties* I, 17, 54. Harrison notes that Augustine stressed a similar theme in the *City of God* XIX, where he emphasizes the role of the *paterfamilias* in “securing peace in the state by maintaining peace by just government of his household according to the rules of the state.” Carol Harrison, “The Silent Majority: the Family in Patristic Thought,” in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 89.

<sup>15</sup>Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” *Reader*, 498.

<sup>16</sup>Westminster Confession XXV.II, qtd. Rushdoony, 179.

As Scripture clarifies, no man can serve two sovereign masters. Accordingly, Scripture provides that at the establishment of a new primary family by the covenant of marriage, former biological claims must in some sense be abandoned; the spouses leave father and mother to cleave to one another within their new, autonomous household.<sup>17</sup> In the same way, Scripture indicates that at the entrance of Christ's preeminent family by the covenant of baptism, former biological claims must in some sense be abandoned; having been espoused to Christ in baptism, the Christian in a very real sense leaves father and mother in order to cleave in the primary loyalties, to Christ and to the members of His household. Furthermore, one must remember that the Christian rite of initiation into God's new family is not essentially a marriage rite in the biblical sense; rather, in the language of Jesus and throughout the Epistles, the Christian's rite of initiation into God's family is the baptismal sacrament of new birth. The Christian is born again, or adopted, into the family of the church, thus to submit to its sovereign claims upon him.<sup>18</sup> Having been found in Christ, the Christian is a new creature, with new primary identities, loyalties, and primary family members. As Peter Selby puts it, "what happens, inevitably, is that the notion of 'family' as the key to membership and esteem (now) has to take second place to the new community of faith."<sup>19</sup>

In light of these Scriptural premises, positing the biological family as the basic, central locus of the Christian's allegiance becomes highly problematic. The only suitable alternative is for Christians to construe their family life in light of the church's primacy. The church is the only com-

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<sup>17</sup>See Genesis 3 and Ephesians 5.

<sup>18</sup>Selby notes that the "rebirth" which Jesus requires of Nicodemus would have been thought to have literally changed his line of descent; "so the source of his membership in the community of God's people is changed from human descent to spiritual descent. This is also the effect enacted for all believers when they are baptized into the family of faith, which is God's 'house,' that is, God's lineage." Selby, 165. In Selby's thought, this rebirth is no mere analogy, but would have been understood as the total transformation of natural loyalties and intimacies in God's new "clan:" "this very quickly goes beyond a mere method of explanation, an analogy to help people understand. Were it just that, it might simply be replaced by other analogies in other cultures. . . . But it (emerges not to commend present loyalties) but to offer a transformation of those loyalties that people naturally have. Natural loyalties may be determined by the boundaries of kinship, but not so with the new clan God is creating: whoever does the will of God is my (parent and sibling)." Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Selby, 166.

munity that is uniquely called into being by Christ's Gospel, sustained by His Spirit for the glory of the Father. The church is the family which Christ forms uniquely for Himself, to be the community of persons that uniquely conforms to the triune life of God in the world. As such, the church constitutes an entirely new social reality in the fallen world, and offers a more authentic human community than the merely natural institutions of family and state; and only within this community may human beings, as created spiritual beings, be uniquely summoned to realize the full endowment of God's grace. Having been called into being by the radical Gospel of Christ, the church is a much profounder witness to God's grace than the naturally occurring human family;<sup>20</sup> and as such, the church is by its very nature an alternative politic that re-defines and re-structures every order within it. The church, as a community revealed to be more determinative than the biological family in God's order, "thus challenges family loyalties."<sup>21</sup>

### **A Constructive Theology of the Church's Family**

Although allegiance to God, His Christ, and His kingdom precedes and relativizes the family, it certainly does not destroy it.<sup>22</sup> The issue that remains, then, is how Christians ought to order their Christian families as basic political units in relation to the church, which is become the Christian's primary political unit. Having given ultimate allegiance to the church, how should smaller communities of biological, affective, and covenantal allegiance be structured?

The first step in the Christian revision of the family is the acknowledgement that the biblical prohibitions on idolatry forbid us to imagine God on our own terms. As Rodney Clapp notes, Christians may freely agree with Aristotle that, contrary to the thinking of the fragmented world of postmodern hyper-individualism, persons are social animals.<sup>23</sup> It is both naturally necessary, and commanded by the God of Israel and the church, that we should journey with our companions.<sup>24</sup> Given such essen-

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<sup>20</sup>Hauerwas, Stanley, "Family Grace: The Christian Family and the Difference it Can Make for the American Family," *Grace Upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Langford* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 218.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Clapp, 77.

<sup>23</sup>Clapp, 24.

<sup>24</sup>Clapp, 25.

tials in the human person, in light of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures give us the church as the central society of Christian life, the solely Christian polity in the fallen world.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, it is important to recall here that the human imagination loathes a vacuum, and in the absence of the church's Christ-centered polis under which to construe and structure the foundational unit of the family, even Christians will turn to the only alternative community available, the state. Historically, the state requires Christians to reduce their Christian commitments to merely personal interests or private concerns in the life of the individual, safely tucked away for application in the private home life.<sup>26</sup> In the absence of corporate allegiance to the church, modern Christians succumb to this relegation and over-emphasize the family as the only tolerable sphere of Christian life that they are granted in a secular culture. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not meant for such relegation. Rather, the Gospel is meant to be lived and enacted in the public, communal, political sphere of the church, which stands for Christ among the nations, and defines what it means to be a family within its politic. In affirming the robustly biblical doctrine of the church as the all-encompassing kingdom and family of God on earth, a universal community dispersed in its various homes (rather than being construed as a mere parallel community outlet for the family), the Christian family can position itself in service to God's purposes within their ultimate community;<sup>27</sup> the Christian family will become the church's family.

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<sup>25</sup>Clapp, 25.

<sup>26</sup>Clapp, 50.

<sup>27</sup>James Dunn points out the significance of early church gatherings within wealthy urban households: "the earliest churches were all house churches and the model of a well ordered household could also serve as a model of a well ordered congregation." James D. G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament" in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 56. Furthermore, Dunn continues, the Household Codes should be read in context as serving as means of witness to the wider society: "the household codes were attempts to codify the rules which had been found most effective in promoting social welfare and stability . . . to indicate that Christian discipleship could be supportive of society's basic structures . . . (for) witness bearing, both facilitating communication with the rest of the society, and making possible an evangelistic impact." Dunn, 57. Here we see the New Testament writers construing basic household structures of convenience for the service of the church's mission, "concern for the well ordered household as an integral part of being the church and of effective witness to the wider community." Ibid.

To this end, the church's family must extend the church's hospitality. The Scriptures prescribe in particular that Christ's revision of the biological family is to break open kinship boundaries according to the superceding, creative and hospitable grace that invites all persons, at any stage of development, into familial union with God; the New Testament language of the church as family emphasizes the character of God's transformation of primary relationships according to His grace.<sup>28</sup> As Hauerwas puts it, Christians are called to be married and to form families for the spiritual and practical edification of the church,<sup>29</sup> and those so called are presumed to accept the call and responsibility to have and care for their particular children and private concerns in the name of the church's community, which extends itself to the homeless, the alien, the dying, the preborn, and to all for whom it prays.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, the church's family raises its children on behalf of the church. In particular, construing a revised theology of the Christian family will implicate the most critical points of tension between the church and its families, particularly regarding the issue of vocations and parental prerogatives. The family's construal of itself as the church's family requires parental submission to the duty to make their home the stimulating, nurturing environment for their children's well-informed and broad exploration of vocation among the church's people, and according to the church's construal of the external world.

Thus, the Christian family that accepts the sublime vocation of living as an extension of the church's mission will send its children into the world for service, and will preemptively resign their children to God's personal calling to them as His own agents in the world. Given that the Christian parent hopes in the resurrection, and thus does not depend on lineage to insure after-life renown, and finds ultimate meaning in Christ, that parent can afford to relinquish any claim on the economic, emotional, or procreative resources of children; and given that the Christian parent's own personal vision and mission is conformed to the broader mission of the universal church, the Christian parent does not need to retain children to serve personal purposes.

Accordingly, all members of the church's family should be viewed in relation to their primary loyalty to God, thereby avoiding both a false

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<sup>28</sup>Selby, 165.

<sup>29</sup>Hauerwas, *Family Grace*, 224.

<sup>30</sup>Hauerwas, *Family Grace*, 227.

anthropology and the idolatrous assumptions of radical patriarchy where "father is king." The Christian faith, as attested by its martyrs and scripture, proclaims that only Christ is king. With regard to patriarchy, the New Testament household codes must then be read in light of the prior claim of Christ on the lives of wives and children. The significant benefits of benevolent patriarchal structures cannot be embraced by modern evangelicalism without regard for the family structure's purpose within the church; modern Christianity commits a grave error in the assumption that a father's allegiance bends first to a program of dogged maintenance of natural law rather than to Jesus Christ. Such allegiance is intolerable for the Christian, given that the God of the Bible is neither a philosophical construct nor an impersonal force to be cordoned off into our respective loci of morality.<sup>31</sup> As John Howard Yoder explains, the Christian person, united to God, is definitively liberated from every natural or given form of subjection or alienation;<sup>32</sup> and this liberation from secular categories may be lived with propriety and charity within the borders of the church.<sup>33</sup>

It is only this light of Christian revision of the natural order that notions of patriarchy, and its benefits, may be embraced by the Christian. Since the new order of the church is become the Christian's own renewed lifestyle of loving missionary impact and creative transformation in the world, the Christian can freely embrace the givenness of certain societal roles on the model of Jesus' own example of servanthood.<sup>34</sup> Knowing of a certainty that "in Christ there is neither male nor female, slave nor free,"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>"Christians affirm that . . . through God's revelation—through the particular culture of Israel, in the particular person of Jesus—can we see the natural order as it really is and ought to be." Clapp, 15, 45.

<sup>32</sup>"The liberation of the Christian from 'the way things are,' which has been brought about by the Gospel of Christ . . . makes evident to the believer that the givenness of our subjection to the enslaving or alienating powers of this world is broken. It is natural to feel Christ's liberation reaching into every kind of bondage, and to want to act in accordance with that radical shift." John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 45.

<sup>33</sup>Yoder, 185.

<sup>34</sup>"The wife or child or slave who can accept subordination 'because it is fitting in the Lord' has not forsaken the radicality of the call of Jesus; it is precisely that attitude toward the structures of this world, this freedom from needing to smash them since they are about to crumble anyway, which Jesus had been first to teach and in His suffering to concretize." Yoder, 186-187.

<sup>35</sup>Galatians 3.

family members may persist in “voluntary subordination in the power of Christ, instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully,” as behooves the dignity of an agent of the servant church within society.<sup>36</sup> Though the arbitrary mandates of a natural law model may oppress spouses and children into “natural” roles (which can easily become predatory means of accommodating purely biological structures), the authority of Christ and the mission of the church frees wives to obey and husbands to serve, children to trust, and parents to nurture for the sake of Christ, for the church’s order, and for the benefit of the world.

Furthermore, in as much as the Christian parent has renounced the pagan drive to produce heirs and generations to bear the family name in the world in light of the Christian hope of the life in the world to come, the Christian family will prepare itself to affirm warmly any potential inclination to the traditionally prized vocation of celibacy as a great gift to the church’s life.<sup>37</sup> As Hauerwas points out, such freedom to endorse the celibate state is due largely to the fact that Christians do not have to have children to be Christians, because the Gospel can be received by those who were not raised in it.<sup>38</sup> The Gospels resound with the same account of Jesus’ statements on the transience of the married state relative to life in the heavenly kingdom, as we find in Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35. Furthermore, Jesus states that, although the Pharisees rejoice

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<sup>36</sup> “. . . the example and teaching of Jesus himself . . . enables the person in a subordinate position in society to accept and live within that status without resentment, at the same time that it calls upon the superordinate position to forsake or renounce all domineering use of that status. The call then is not precisely a simple ratification of the stratified society into which the Gospel has come. The subordinate person becomes a free ethical agent in the act of voluntarily acceding to subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully. The claim is not that there is immediately a new world regime that violently replaces the old; rather, the old and new order exists concurrently on different levels...the apostles transformed the concept of living within a role by finding out how in each role the servanthood of Christ, the voluntary subordination of one who knows that another regime is normative, could be made concrete.” Yoder, 186-187.

<sup>37</sup>Carol Harrison recalls the early church’s general preference for ascetic and authoritative “holy virginity,” and the relative dearth of reference to the positive aspects of family life in the early church fathers. Harrison notes that the single state was preferred as tending more towards unity and solidarity within the church than did the fracturing influence of marriage and reproduction. Harrison, 80-97.

<sup>38</sup>Hauerwas, “Radical Hope,” *Reader*, 512.



in their biological/ethnic inheritance, God is able "to raise up children for Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8). Accordingly, the church's family will form its children to regard the radical option of chaste celibacy as "the first way of life for a Christian, the practice necessary for the church to participate in the hope secured through God's cross, and in the embodiment of the hope that God's kingdom is both real and expected."<sup>39</sup> Such familial affirmation of the celibate vocation accords with the apostles' legitimation because of the church's recognized need to grow through witness and conversions dispersed among the nations, often by unmarried missionaries.<sup>40</sup>

In turn, it is only from this preferential affirmation of singleness, as the vocation tending most immediately to the church's mission in the world, that the church's parents should form their children for vocations to family life. Rather than vacuously proclaiming marriage to be the norm on secular models of natural law's deductions from biology, the church's family proceeds from a prior commitment to the church's mission in the world, which defines and warrants both married and single life. Given that the church is a community of persons called to follow Christ's servant leadership at the expense of every natural accommodation, and even at the expense of life itself, "the intelligibility of the Christian understanding of marriage makes sense only in relation to the early church's legitimization of singles."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>"When the church loses the significance of singleness, I suspect it does so because Christians no longer have any confidence that the Gospel can be received by those who were not "raised" in it. Put differently, Christian justifications of the family may often be the result of Christians no longer believing that the Gospel is true or joyful." Hauerwas, "Family Grace," *Reader* 224.

<sup>40</sup>"Singleness was legitimate . . . because the mission of the church was such that 'between the times' the church required those who were capable of complete service to the Kingdom . . . through the (most) significant sacrifice of giving up heirs. There can be no more radical claim than this, as it is the clearest institutional expression that one's future is not guaranteed by the family, but by the (Gospel preserved in the) church. Hauerwas continues elsewhere, "singleness is as valid a way of life as marriage because it poignantly embodies the hope of the Kingdom of God and because children are not necessary for the growth of that Kingdom, because the church is that family that can call the stranger into her midst and recognizes the parental role of those who do not marry." Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," *Reader*, 499, 613.

<sup>41</sup>Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," *Reader*, 497.

Hauerwas is insistent on this point. If Christians genuinely entertain the joy and certainty of their faith and its promises of heaven, pastors and parents must avoid the tendency simply to underwrite the broad assumption that marriage is (merely) a natural and primary context,<sup>42</sup> such that most Christians assume that marriage is the first mode of sexual life, whereas singleness remains to be justified.<sup>43</sup> Rather, Hauerwas urges that in witness to the Christian's present affirmation of the life of the world to come, Christian marriage should be promoted not as a merely natural institution, but rather as a highly particularized vocation and sacrament, engaged in by called persons within a community of people who marry for the purpose of serving the church.<sup>44</sup> The church's marriages should thus be construed as heroic institutions, prized for their service to the polity which authorizes and creates each marriage.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Church in the Center**

In summary, the church's parents will prepare their children to answer God's call to the utmost by raising them in a home construed not as the father's palace nor as an intimate, private haven where private devotion may be cordoned off from the wily secular culture. Rather, the church's family operates its home as the church's mission base, open and expendable for witness through hospitality, and, in its vigorous engagement with culture, as a vehicle for the church's properly public role in society.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," *Reader*, 497.

<sup>43</sup>Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," *Reader*, 497.

<sup>44</sup>Hauerwas qualifies that "singleness is the first way of life for Christians does not imply that marriage and the having of children is in any way a less worthy way to be Christian. Rather, that Christians do not have to marry means that for Christians marriage is given new dignity. We are called to be married for the upbuilding of that community called church." Hauerwas, "Sex in Public," *Reader* 227, 447.

<sup>45</sup>Here, our authors resonate with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which states that "marriage and the constitution of family life is the church's act, celebrated in its public liturgy, initiates the parties into an ecclesial order and creates rights and duties in the church between the spouses and their children." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1631, 1069, 1537 (New York: Doubleday Religion: second edition, 2003).

<sup>46</sup>The construing of the home as the servant of the church avoids the positing of a false dichotomy between the exterior "public realm" and the "private" life of the Christian home, as though the church and her people were not called into the world for its benefit. In this regard, Clapp notes that modern American

Most importantly, the church's family must order its life as a center for the church's catechesis of the church's children. Rather than construing the family dinner table as the podium for parental opinions, the church's parents will carefully defer to the church's teachings in their conversation, and will faithfully transmit them to their children out of regard for God's (not the parents') ultimate claim on their children's hearts and minds.<sup>47</sup> The church's parents understand that their biological connection to their children merely allows for the immediate extensions of the church's teaching and nurturing ministry to their particular children. This notion will express itself further in parents who honor single and widowed Christian adults as co-parents by employing their ministry as co-educators and caretakers for the church's children, in light of the single person's shared parental office and responsibilities within the church.<sup>48</sup>

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evangelicalism has tended to embrace the relegation of the spiritual to the private sphere: "with the rise of the industrialization came the separation of life into compartments of public and private. . . . today we are prone to think and imagine according to these divisions: the public world is male, productive, and a-religious. The private world is female, consumption-oriented, and religious. . . . Christians have (thus) been oddly complicit in relegating God to the domestic . . . religion has become synonymous with family life and only with family life, till it becomes "hard to see how one could safely leave home at all, while the household removed from the public world becomes trivial and thin." Clapp, 57, 65.

<sup>47</sup>In this regard, Hauerwas emphasizes the Christian's responsibility to have (or adopt) children in terms of "the refusal to separate marriage and the having of children . . . what we are about as Christians is the having of children . . . the having of children is not a matter of our being able to make sure the world into which children are born will be safe . . . children are the way we remember that it is God that matters, not making the world safe or rich." Hauerwas, "Radical Hope," *Reader*, 227, 517.

<sup>48</sup>"In the church, every adult, whether single or married, is called to be a parent. All Christian adults have a parental responsibility because of baptism. Biology does not make parents in the church. Baptism does." Hauerwas, "Abortion Theologically Understood," *Reader*, 612. Hauerwas elaborates further, "from a Christian perspective (that children are born of our bodies) is not a necessary condition for our responsibility for children." Hauerwas, "Radical Hope," *Reader*, 227. On this understanding, "Christians, single and married, are parents," since "parent names an office of the Christian community that everyone in the community is expected to fulfill faithfully. Those called to marriage are presumed to accept the call and responsibility to have and care for particular children in the name of the community . . . that is why the church rightly expects parents to bring up children in the faith." Hauerwas, "Radical Hope," *Reader*, 227.

In conclusion, the church's deliberate understanding of her sovereign vocation as God's family strengthens the human family by conferring an adequately scriptural identity on its family units, by which those units may conform themselves to a healthy higher purpose in order to prosper as a family.<sup>49</sup> For Christ's people, the higher purpose and organizing principle of their families must be Christ's church rather than the goals of violent nations, secular culture, or the self-interested family itself. As John Paul II concluded in the vision of Christian society described in *Centesimus Annus*, "though the totalitarian state tends to absorb the family within itself, the church's defense of her own freedom and identity in a disparaging culture enables the church to defend the human person and families under her care in their mandate 'to obey God rather than men.'"<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Clapp, 65.

<sup>50</sup>Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* 45.

# OPEN CREATION AND THE REDEMPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

by

**John Sanders**

At a conference in Chicago in 2004, and after I had presented a paper on open theism, a Lutheran theologian asked, “What about rocks and trees in open theism?” My response was that the proponents of this model of God would love to apply open theism to such topics, but to date had been preoccupied with gaining a place at the theological table. That was then. Circumstances have changed. The time has come for the application.

## **The Open Theistic Perspective**

Open theism as a theological movement now is sufficiently established that its proponents do not have to spend all their energies defending it. They can now explore the implications of the model for various topics. This is what this essay proposes to do. I will first summarize the open theistic perspective, then examine the nature of creation, the nature of redemption, and conclude with a discussion of the relationship between creation and redemption, with special attention to environmental concerns.

Open theism is a model of God which affirms that God, in an act of self-limitation, created beings *ex nihilo* with the intention that creatures would come to experience the love inherent in the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> Though

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<sup>1</sup>For a longer exposition of open theism, see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), and Clark Pinnock, et. al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

omnipotent, God exercises a type of sovereignty which grants considerable independence to creatures. God is “open” in two important senses. First, God is open to what creatures bring about—God is affected by creatures. Second, God is open to the future in that, even for God, there is more than one possible future. God has “dynamic omniscience,” meaning that God knows all the past and present as definite and God knows the future as possibilities. Also, God has chosen to rely upon creatures for many aspects of life and history. Consequently, God takes risks because not everything in creation goes the way God specifically wants it to go. God has often had to adjust divine plans and implement flexible strategies in light of what creatures have done with their freedom.

### **The Nature of Creation and God**

With this basic understanding in mind, we can now proceed to a discussion of the nature of creation. Though open theism upholds creation *ex nihilo*, I want to point out that creation is more than simply the production of matter. In fact, creation should not be understood as a one-time event in the past which God preserves, but also as a beginning with a dynamic structure that enables the creation itself to produce new beings, events, and relations. In the Genesis accounts, the original creation contained some structure and was reliable, but it was not static or complete because God did not desire that it remain as it was.<sup>2</sup> That creation is ongoing is seen in the divine call for plants and animals to multiply. With this shaping of the world in ways that are not predetermined, the earth will be different than it was at the beginning. God empowers creatures to bring about states of affairs that did not exist at the beginning. When humans, for instance, begin to occupy the land (Genesis 1:28) that will take on characteristics it did not have on the seventh day. God chooses to bring about a world in which God is not the only one who makes things new and different. In this respect, creation is “open” because God instantiated a reliable but not fixed or static creation, which in some significant respects is open-ended.

The empowerment of creatures implies that God is a “power-sharing” deity. God calls upon the waters and the land to produce that which did not exist. Next, God calls upon the plants and animals to procreate.

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<sup>2</sup>This section is indebted to Terence Fretheim, *God and Creation in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, Abingdon, 2005).

That God does not do the procreating for the creatures suggests that the creatures have now become creators, resembling God in that they also bring forth new beings. Humans in particular are given a vocation to be God's regents to tend the earth in God's stead. In this respect, human vocation is necessary for the continuance of at least some aspects of creation.<sup>3</sup> God entered upon a journey with creatures, one for which the outcome was neither predetermined nor foreknown. God works with creatures to bring about new realities.

An aspect of divine creation often overlooked is that God is not simply creator in the sense of producing matter. The story of God's activity in the Bible depicts God working to produce new social, religious, political, and economic realities. That God is creator in these important areas of life will be useful later in this paper to connect the doctrines of creation and redemption. Having discussed the nature of creation we now move to an open theist understanding of redemption.

### **The Nature of Redemption**

God took a risk in granting relative independence to creatures, and the risk has brought negative results. Creation has miscarried. Sin mars all the spheres of divine creativity just mentioned: our relationship to God, to the physical world as well as our relations with other humans.<sup>4</sup> Each of the areas harmed by sin requires reconciliation and healing, which is why the New Testament contains a plethora of images regarding redemption and atonement.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the touchstones by which Christians align their life stories with that of Jesus. Jesus models loving ways of relating to others, overcomes hate with forgiveness, and is the ground of hope that destruction and death can be overcome. The incarnation and resurrection are creative acts of God by which new possibilities for the world arise. The resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit are indications of an inaugurated eschatology in which the "new creation" has already begun but is not yet completed. The eschatological future has broken in to the present. The renewal of the heavens

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<sup>3</sup>See Fretheim, 49-52.

<sup>4</sup>For a good overview of various conceptualizations of sin see, Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Brenda Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

and the earth and the various aspects of life contained therein are granted the possibility of redemption. Accordingly, I will briefly explore elements of this redemption.

**1. Reconciliation of Sinful Creatures.** First, redemption involves a reconciliation of sinful creatures to God (not God to creatures) as well as the reconciliation of creatures to one another. Second, redemption is addressed to whole persons and this includes bodies and minds rather than simply “souls.” The New Testament writers did not concentrate on getting immaterial substances to heaven after death. Rather, they were concerned with the welfare of embodied persons as seen by their discussions of such things as food, clothing, and employment. Third, sin has infected all of the relationships in which we find ourselves, but God is working to heal the diseased relations by creating communities who work to overcome sinful racial, socio-economic, and gendered structures (Galatians 3:28). Fourth, the renewal which began in the resurrection of Jesus continues to spread and one day will culminate in a renewed heaven and earth in which there is no sin to fracture our relationships. The new creation has been inaugurated and God calls us to cooperate with the mission of God. One day the mission will be completed.

If salvation involves bodies, then it involves the physical order. However, many Christians believe that, although the “new” creation involves resurrected human bodies, it means the destruction of the physical world as it presently exists. Such a view can lead to a lack of concern for the environment. Two points should be made in response to this view. First, redemption is not the annihilation of creation but rather its renewal. Just as human bodies are not annihilated when they experience salvation in Jesus, so the present heaven and earth will not be annihilated but renewed. It is common for biblical scholars to point out that, in the passages about the new creation, “new” means new in quality in contrast to the old. Evangelicals in North America typically believe that “the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). That is, God is going to annihilate the present physical creation. However, this understanding is based on a mistranslation because the text should read: “the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.”<sup>6</sup> The Greek

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<sup>6</sup>See Stephen Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision of Creation Care*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2010), 68-69.



word for what is translated “burned up” or “disclosed” is *heurēskein*, which means to find out.<sup>7</sup> God is going to reveal the truth about what has happened by refining creation, not destroying it.

**2. Don’t Contribute to Creation’s Destruction.** The second element of redemption is that, even if one remains convinced that the present world is going to be destroyed by God, there are reasons why Christians should not contribute to the destruction of the environment now. To begin, even if God is going to destroy it, there is no biblical warrant for anyone but God doing so. There is no biblical call to collaborate with God in destroying the planet, but there is biblical warrant for caring for the environment. Also, wanton contamination of the environment conflicts with the mission of Jesus. If Jesus is the model for the Christian life and Jesus healed the sick, then we ought to be involved in healing fractured relationships as well as broken bodies. Contamination of the environment fosters sickness rather than healing. If our discarded electronic devices end up in areas where poor people live and the heavy metals seep into the water supply poisoning the people who live there, then we are helping to make them sick. In the United States, cases of asthma are sharply increasing because of high levels of particles in the air. Coal-fired power plants in the northern United States produce acid rain which pollutes the lakes with high levels of mercury, and this eventually makes its way to humans via fish. Thus, we are slowly making our neighbors sick instead of helping to heal them.

With this summary of an openness understanding of creation and redemption in hand, we can now address some specific issues. First, how should the relationship between creation and salvation be understood? Several items come into play here. To begin, creation is not a one time event but is an ongoing process. The history of evolution manifests the ongoing and unfinished nature of divine creation. As mentioned above, God’s original creation included a dynamic infrastructure with its own autonomy that allows for the creation of new beings, events, and types of relations. Next, the freedom of the creation entailed divine risk. The creation has taken some bad turns and now is deeply defaced by sin. Creation is the framework within which sin arises and it also is the framework in which redemption is carried out.

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<sup>7</sup>The English words *heuristic* and *eureka* derive from this term.

Furthermore, God is creator, not just of original matter, but also in the social, religious, and other areas of human existence. Sin has also distorted these aspects of divine creation. Consequently, redemption is understood as a particular dimension of God's creative work in order to bring about a renewed creation transforming all of its dimensions, physical and social. Also, according to Paul, the Son of God, the redeemer, is also the one through whom God created the universe (Colossians 2:16). The trinitarian God who worked to create us is the same God who works to redeem us. God has not given up on his creation but desires to renew it. The spoiled creation is the subject of God's redemptive work, so creation and salvation cannot be isolated from one another. But neither can they be collapsed into each other because God did not create in order to redeem it. Sin was not part of God's original design. God has had to adjust the divine plan to include redemption as a means to a new creation.

**3. Refuse An Escapist Eschatology.** Another issue is how to avoid an escapist eschatology which obliterates hope for this earth. Openness theology affirms the majority of traditional Christian teachings, including the resurrection of bodies to new life. Salvation is understood to include both the redemption of all spheres of life on earth as well as continued life with God after death in the new heavens and earth. Many proponents of open theism are evangelicals and many evangelicals believe that God is going to destroy the earth. Some interpret this to mean that, if God is going to destroy the earth, then it is not within our power to destroy it. Hence, they believe we can pollute and use up the natural resources because God will not allow the planet to be destroyed before the time set for its destruction.

It was mentioned above that this idea of God's coming destruction of the creation is based on a mistranslation of a biblical text. An additional problem is that this false idea leads many evangelicals to conclude that God will take care of everything, so we need not do anything. God will miraculously overcome any problem we develop. One student voiced this sentiment when he said, "If we run out of oil, God will just make more." The Calvinist theologian Calvin Beisner defends this notion by appeal to the Old Testament story of how God miraculously created more oil for a widow in order to pay off her debts (2 Kings 4:1-7).<sup>8</sup> Because, says Beisner, nature

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<sup>8</sup>Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Acton Institute and William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 25-26.

is not a closed system for God, we can rest assured that God will not let us run out of natural resources. I reject such an idea as unbiblical.

**4. Polarities To Be Avoided.** Open theism seeks to avoid two polarities in this regard. They are the evangelical belief that God will take care of everything and the process theology belief that God will take care of nothing.<sup>9</sup> Against the notion that God will resolve all of the problems unilaterally, openness affirms that God has granted a great deal of independence to creatures. Above, it was said that God decided to rely on humans by giving us a vocation that is necessary for the continuance of creation. God has given us a task and we are failing God in some significant respects. We have seriously damaged God's work and failed to achieve the mission entrusted to us by God. Yet, God has not thrown in the towel but has chosen to work to redeem creation.

Just as God elected to rely on creatures to continue the work of creation, God has decided to work through us rather than alone (e. g., to evangelize and feed the hungry). This means that God has chosen to be dependent upon our actions for a great many aspects of life. Does this mean that we could contaminate the environment to such an extent as to make life untenable? Since God has not prevented us from wreaking horrible wars, draughts, and the like, this seems a reasonable conclusion. It seems that God has chosen to solicit our cooperation in the divine work of redemption rather than simply doing it by God's own self.<sup>10</sup> Since God decided to make some important features of the continuance of creation dependent upon human vocation, the view that God is in total control and what humans do is irrelevant must be rejected.

The second polarity is process theology's lack of eschatological hope that God will bring about the new heavens and new earth. The God of process theology cannot unilaterally cause an electron to move, so the preservation of the planet is decidedly on our shoulders, not God's. The

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<sup>9</sup>Jürgen Moltmann and John Polkinghorne are open theists who take a similar approach.

<sup>10</sup>A number of evangelicals have produced works promoting the view propounded here. For example, see Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (cited above), Calvin DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), and R. J. Berry ed., *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

openness of God model affirms divine omnipotence and insists that God can work unilaterally within creation.<sup>11</sup> The biblical record testifies that God has historically brought about that which did not exist on a number of occasions. Hence, we are not totally on our own. Proponents of open theism live in the tension between the two polarities of evangelical escapist theology and the lack of hope in process theology.

### **Salvation and Environmental Threats**

How we understand salvation in the context of environmental threats is critical. For open theism, salvation entails both vertical and horizontal aspects. Redemption involves both our incorporation into the divine life and as our relations with other creatures. Again, two polarities need to be avoided: that salvation is only about getting to heaven or it is only about healing the planet. The “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation” says: “We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.”<sup>12</sup> Open theists believe that redemption is about both this life and the next because the salvation already begun will not be complete until God resurrects us to a renewed bodily life in the new heavens and earth. Open theists go beyond the process ideas of “objective immortality” (God has eternal memories of what we were) or “subjective immortality” (the survival of a disembodied soul). Jesus was raised bodily from the dead confirming both that death has not the final word and that God continues to value physical existence.

In addition to this eschatological embodiment, open theists affirm that salvation requires the transformation of embodied existence, not just the salvation of “souls.” Salvation engages every sphere of life affected by sin: economic, political, and environmental. James says that true religion is caring for widows and orphans (1:27) as well as feeding and clothing the poor (2:15). Paraphrasing James, we might ask how one can claim to love one’s neighbor while at the same time acting in ways that unnec-

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<sup>11</sup>The openness model bears some affinities with process theology, such as dynamic omniscience and divine temporality. However, it is important to note some crucial differences between open theism and process thought: openness affirms the traditional notion of divine omnipotence and that God’s relation to and dependence upon creation is voluntary, not necessary.

<sup>12</sup>Cited in Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 128.

essarily pollute the air and water supplies of our neighbors. The redemption of creation includes both salvation of individuals and healing of the environment because God wants to redeem every sphere of life affected by sin. God works to redeem whole persons, and the way we treat the environment affects our embodied neighbors. The renewed heavens and earth means the continuation of God's physical creation, but in a transformed state in which we, as embodied beings, live appropriately with all other embodied beings. If God cares for embodied existence on this planet and will not give up on it, then neither should we. If divine dominion is enacted not by exploiting the land but by caring for it, then human dominion, which should image God's dominion, should also care for it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See the discussion in Allen Verhey, *Nature and Altering It* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 84-85. Verhey's book is particularly insightful in analyzing the various stories people use to understand nature and the human relation to it.

# **FROM SECOND BLESSING TO SECOND COMING: THE EVOLUTION OF DISPENSATIONALISM WITHIN THE HOLINESS HERMENEUTIC**

by

**Jonathan Dodrill**

One of the strangest theological anachronisms of our time is the close relationship between dispensationalism and Wesleyanism. It is almost a universal phenomenon among ministers of my acquaintance. But if, in fact, a wedding has been consummated, it is an illegitimate marriage because the two partners are theologically incompatible. Few people seem to recognize this fact.<sup>1</sup>

According to the standard historiographies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Evangelicalism, it is assumed that the Holiness Movement, to a large degree, joined forces with fundamentalism<sup>2</sup> in the battle against the

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<sup>1</sup>H. Ray Dunning, "Biblical Interpretation and Wesleyan Theology," *Wesley Theological Journal*, Vol. 9 (Spring 1974): 47-51.

<sup>2</sup>In defining what "fundamentalism" is I have rejected the dominant historiography of George Marsden and utilized Ernest Sandeen's thesis in his *Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* which has been at the center of much of Donald Dayton's understanding of Fundamentalism. Essentially, Sandeen understands fundamentalism to be both an issue of Reform Orthodoxy's resistance to modernism and the simultaneous rise of Dispensationalism, as well as other millennial movements. A fuller understanding of evangelicalism and fundamentalism can be found in my essay, "Evangelicalism Examined Again . . . Continuing the Debate Between Donald Dayton and George Marsden," in *The Continuing Relevance of Wesleyan Theology: Essays in Honor of Laurence Wood* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

“liberals” or “modernists.” Yet, when delving into the issues surrounding fundamentalism, one finds that they almost entirely revolve around issues of orthodoxy. Certainly, Holiness people viewed themselves as orthodox Christians, yet orthodoxy is quite a subjective term. Charles Hodge was a major critic of holiness teaching, taking every opportunity to “slay the dragon” of perfectionism. So how would it be that the very camp that questioned the orthodoxy of the holiness people would become their ally? The easy answer is that the fundamentalists provided a safe solution to liberalism. Holiness people were certainly not liberal theologically, yet socially they bore very little resemblance to fundamentalists. The quest to find the answer to this question is complex; however, there is a starting point in unlocking this coalescence.

Being the good American frontier Christians that they were, holiness people were simple “Bible Christians.” They read the Bible fervently and, while looking through their perfectionist lenses, took the words on the pages to be literal for the most part. Their Biblical hermeneutic was a product of their folk theology which was shaped by evangelists, professors, local pastors, and most importantly, revival leaders. The Holiness Movement was birthed out of a wider revival movement in the nineteenth century; therefore, most holiness people acquired their theological understanding from such events. However, it did not take long for a few holiness leaders to take the reins of this important topic of hermeneutics. This paper will examine the hermeneutics of a few holiness leaders (relying heavily on Phoebe Palmer) and make use of Stephen Lennox’s dissertation “Biblical Interpretation in the Holiness Movement, 1875-1920.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose is to shed light on how holiness hermeneutics of the nineteenth century provided fertile soil for dispensationalists to tap into the holiness movement in their fight against modernism.

### **The Americanization of John Wesley**

When speaking of the Holiness Movement, one cannot deny the overwhelming centrality of the doctrine of entire sanctification. As will become clear, Phoebe Palmer read every passage of Scripture as if it had only one primary message, holiness. An interesting question then arises. What does the experience of entire sanctification have to do with the authority of Scripture? Palmer makes the case that one cannot experience

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen John Lennox, “Biblical Interpretation in the Holiness Movement, 1875-1920” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1992).

entire sanctification until s/he fully believes in the Bible. Furthermore, Paul Bassett states that, "For Palmer and for the early holiness movement in general, Scripture was the *one and only* source of authoritative doctrine."<sup>4</sup>

Yet, it is hard to assume that the Bible was their "one and only source of authority" considering the emphasis placed on experiential religion. The holiness movement was/is experiential in the insistence on a second blessing experience which leads to a clearer illumination of the Spirit. Thus, it seems that the authority of experience would at least be a "sub-authoritative" component along with the Bible. However this experience shaped their hermeneutic, holiness theologians did advocate for the sole authority of the Bible. But how they read the Bible was through the lenses of their second blessing experiences and the illumination that comes with such an experience.

It was precisely this theological reading of Scripture that promoted the idea of living Biblical holiness. There was a Restorationist bent to much of the holiness understanding of Scripture. For Palmer and others, believing the Bible (first through cognitive recognition followed by experiencing Biblical truths) went hand in hand with the immediate experience. One could not have the immediate experience without fully believing the Bible. And conversely, one could not interpret, understand, or experience the Bible without fully experiencing sanctification. In examining W. B. Godbey's theology, Lennox asserts that "the goal of Christian experience is evident in Godbey's intention that his New Testament commentary be an experimental commentary designed to prepare the common person for service to Christ and his description of the Bible as the source of spiritual nourishment."<sup>5</sup>

The American holiness movement, while theologically "Wesleyan," made some key changes to John Wesley's theology, notably his doctrine of holiness. Although Wesley said he was a man of "one book," it is obvious that he was in dialogue with the political, philosophical, and diverse theological discourses of his day. The same cannot be said for Palmer. She was radically committed to the notion of *sola scriptura* and promoted

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Merritt Bassett, "The Theological Identity of the North American Holiness Movement: Its Understanding of the Nature and Role of the Bible," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 85. Emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup>Lennox, 142.



the idea that the *knowledge of Scripture* is essential for salvation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while Wesley believed being a Christian allowed a person to believe the Bible, as previously stated, the reverse was true for the American holiness movement. Additionally, where Wesley saw the Holy Spirit and prevenient grace as responsible for awakening the soul of a person in preparation of justification and sanctification, Palmer holds the Bible responsible. Therefore, the Bible for Palmer *is* the primary means of grace.<sup>7</sup>

The holiness hermeneutic was also strongly influenced by the general hermeneutic of the day. To a large degree, American Christians radicalized the notion of *sola scriptura* by declaring that every person was a capable interpreter. This is what Lennox and others refer to as the “populist hermeneutic.” Palmer’s radicalization of the notion of *sola scriptura* sought to weed out theological sources other than the Bible. Hence she says:

Not Wesley, not Fletcher, not Finney, not Mahan, not Upham, but the Bible, the holy BIBLE, is the first and last, and in the midst always. The BIBLE is the standard, the groundwork, the platform, the creed. Here we stand on common ground, and nothing but the spirit of this blessed book will finally eradicate and extirpate a sectarian spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, this time period saw a great democratization of American Christianity. With numerous denominational splits and the rise of sects and para-church organizations, leadership and influence was not held in the hands of a few leaders. Rather, it was in the hands of the masses.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, this hermeneutical practice of each being his/her own interpreter privatized Christianity. Given the holiness movement’s lack of structure throughout the nineteenth century, it should be acknowledged that the populist hermeneutic was exceptionally influential in constructing a holiness hermeneutic. This emphasis began to shift even more heavily upon the individual soul rather than the collective body of believers. This would explain the shift from Wesley’s terminology of “perfect love”

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<sup>6</sup>Bassett, 86-7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), 251.

<sup>9</sup>This is based on the thesis of Nathan O. Hatch in his *Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

(which demands an object, for God and neighbor as stated in *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason*) in favor of Palmer's "sanctified life" (a personal state of being).<sup>10</sup>

The validity of the individualistic and populist reading of the Bible was incredibly attractive to the lower classes and the socially marginalized (such as women). Thus, the vast majority of holiness people were rural, uneducated, and poor. There were very few instructors sharing with the masses how to read the Bible, so Phoebe Palmer filled the vacuum.

### Transitional Role of Phoebe Palmer

Phoebe Palmer, the mother theologian of the American holiness movement, obviously contributed much to the development of the American view of sanctification. What is less obvious are the consequences her reading of the Bible left on subsequent generations of holiness people.

William Abraham has argued that much of Christian hermeneutics has sought, consciously or unconsciously, to canonize an epistemology along with the canonized books of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> While this may be the case the majority of the time, it seems that Phoebe Palmer had other uses for the Bible that did not include epistemological goals. Rather, Palmer was more concerned with a mode of being as it pertains to salvation of the holiness people. In other words, she was primarily concerned with an adoption of being, manifest through entire sanctification that was based on and portrayed Biblical truth. While a canonized epistemology and a mandated mode of being are not necessarily mutually exclusive in the hermeneutic of Palmer, it is the latter that she passed down to subsequent holiness generations through her understanding of entire sanctification.

Palmer adopted John Wesley's understanding of entire sanctification and transformed it for her current American audience. It is because of her context that she sought a "shorter way" to entire sanctification. Heavily influenced by Charles G. Finney, she agreed with him that "Religion is something to *do*, not something to *wait for*."<sup>12</sup> Hence her understanding of holiness, which she spread all over America and Great Britain,

<sup>10</sup>Lennox, 15, 91.

<sup>11</sup>William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: from the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup>Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, Volume I (Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006), 425.

exchanged the notion of gradualism for immediacy. She truly believed that the shorter way was the “one way.”<sup>13</sup>

Phoebe Palmer’s Americanization of John Wesley’s teaching of entire sanctification (which she saw as “too slow for Americans”<sup>14</sup>) encouraged the Holiness Movement to read the Bible with immediacy, which created fertile soil for the dispensational hermeneutic of early twentieth-century fundamentalism. Additionally, her emphasis on experience along with a quasi-restorationist worldview created uncanny expectations for holiness people. True to her time, she did not think the Bible was a complex book, but a simple book. She adopted the Scottish Common Sense philosophy, leading to a literalistic hermeneutic causing her to emphasize the importance of believing the “WORD OF GOD”<sup>15</sup> completely in order to experience a second blessing of entire sanctification. It was “common sense” to take the Bible at face value in order to receive the “simple and unsophisticated gospel of full salvation.”<sup>16</sup>

This appeal to “common sense” was naturally appealing to Palmer’s audience that often was very suspicious of academic philosophy and reason in general.<sup>17</sup> Their epistemology rested in an inner light resulting from the experience of sanctification and the ease they found in trusting the plain words in the Bible. In fact, many holiness preachers were outright hostile toward modern philosophy, condemning it as insufficient in the face of experiential Christianity. Watson once stated, “A plain man entirely sanctified, without learning, and with the Bible in his hands, has an understanding of the divine promises, sees farther into the prophecies of God, gets a firmer grasp on God’s Word, than all the doctors of divinity that are *not sanctified*.”<sup>18</sup>

Palmer made central the immediate and unexpected return of Christ. While it may be a stretch to label Palmer a premillennialist (and anachro-

<sup>13</sup>Phoebe Palmer, “Way of Holiness,” in *Phoebe Palmer: Selected Writings*, edited by Thomas C. Oden (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 178.

<sup>14</sup>Website of the Archives of the United Methodist Church, “Phoebe Palmer, 1807-1874: A Woman Who Proclaimed A ‘Shorter Way’ To Holiness 1807-1874,” (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>This is often how she refers to the Bible.

<sup>16</sup>Bassett, 87.

<sup>17</sup>Lennox, 130-131, 135.

<sup>18</sup>Lennox, op. cit., 140. Originally from George D. Watson (1891). Emphasis mine.

nistic to label her a dispensationalist), she certainly leaned in that direction. This is evident in her associations with the Millerites, notably Charles Fitch. Palmer wrote to William Miller condemning his practice of date-setting. But this seems to be the extent of her disapproval. She even acknowledged that she was let down after the Great Disappointment in 1844. Woodrow W. Whidden stated that, "While Palmer left relatively few comments on eschatology and no direct treatment of a millennium, she did leave enough to suggest strongly that she was a believer in a literal, visible, cataclysmic second coming of Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup> Because of her adoption of Common Sense philosophy and a simple, literalistic view of the Bible, she naturally tended toward such eschatology. Palmer encouraged her people to "watch" for the coming of Christ and she said that this was the reason why they needed "holiness now."<sup>20</sup>

Palmer put out a pamphlet titled *Israel's Speedy Restoration and Conversion Contemplated; or, Signs of the Times*. In this pamphlet, she speaks of the importance and imminence of Jews returning to Israel, stating "the time *has* come when the Jews must set about making preparations for returning to the land of their fathers."<sup>21</sup> In her discussions on Christ's return and Jewish reestablishment in Israel, she uses a rhetoric that further fertilizes the ground for future dispensationalist leanings. Specifically, she frames Christian history in terms of "dispensations."<sup>22</sup> She quotes Dr. Blayney, using this terminology: "In the *latter days* meaning the times of the *gospel dispensation*."<sup>23</sup> And later, she writes in the preface to her *Pio-*

<sup>19</sup>Woodrow W. Whidden, *Eschatology, Soteriology, and Social Activism in Four Mid-Nineteenth Century Holiness Methodists*, in the online *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/26-30/29-06.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/26-30/29-06.htm) (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>20</sup>Palmer, *Entire Devotion*, 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Phoebe Palmer, *Speedy Restoration and Conversion Contemplated; or, Signs of the Times* (New York: John A. Gray, 1854), 7.

<sup>22</sup> It is not suggested that Palmer was subscribing to dispensationalism as promoted by Darby and Scofield, for that would be anachronistic. However, the argument is that Darby, Scofield, and other dispensationalists tapped into the holiness movement partially because the rhetoric was so similar. Therefore, a dispensationalist preacher could quote Palmer to gain the holiness people's trust while at the same time promoting a dispensationalist worldview.

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, *Israel*, 9.

<sup>24</sup>Phoebe Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences; or, the Gift of Power Received by Faith. Illustrated and Confirmed by the Testimony of Eighty Living Ministers of Various Denominations* (New York: W. C. Palmer Jr., 1868), vi.

ner, “We live under the dispensation of the Spirit.”<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, she explicitly ties this rhetoric to holiness, stating that “[holiness] is the crowning doctrine of the crowning [i.e., the current] dispensation.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Shifting Eschatology in the Holiness Movement**

There was no mono-hermeneutic in the Holiness Movement. Because of the promotion of “common sense” readings and individual interpretations, there was room for a diverse array of meanings. The only constant was entire sanctification. If an individual interpreted a passage as speaking against such a doctrine, s/he was obviously wrong. This diversity allowed the Holiness Movement to contain both postmillennialists and premillennialists.<sup>26</sup>

While Dispensationalists would later frame the greatest promises of God to be the Second Coming, holiness people always viewed the great promise to be the second blessing. However, the notion of fulfilled promises demands a fairly open view of prophecy. Thus, when Dispensationalists spoke of fulfilled promises and the coming of fulfilled promises, holiness people would hear their own language. Furthermore, holiness teaching was shaped in part by John Fletcher’s dispensational framework. While Fletcher’s dispensational view consisted of three periods, the idea provided very fertile ground for Dispensationalist teaching.

In the face of higher criticism, the holiness movement turned to various interpretive models for support. Fletcher’s dispensational framework was ideal. Though holiness people would declare the unity of the Bible (keeping in mind it is void of contradictions), they nonetheless broke it down into Old and New Testament and further into dispensations. This allowed easy answers to questions that were raised by “liberal academics.” Placing an Old Testament figure within a certain dispensation with different rules allows actions and beliefs to be consistent with the whole of Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

Fletcher’s framework worked rather nicely for holiness people. They could keep the unity of the Bible while reinforcing the spirituality of the current age (the Age of the Spirit started with Pentecost). However, various holiness theologians started to reinvent these dispensations. At the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Lennox, 181.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 212-213.

turn of the century, W. B. Godbey spoke of seven dispensations, three of which are identical to Scofield's and four of which are merely worded differently. Additionally, Watson gave the same reason as Dispensationalists regarding the change in a dispensation, the failure of humanity to uphold God's request. Watson further acknowledges that the best way to interpret the Bible is by keeping these dispensations in mind. To try to read without this framework only produces "awkward results."<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the hermeneutical aspect, it is important to understand the social atmosphere of the late nineteenth century. The end of the Civil War brought about great distress for southern Christians and great optimism for northern Christians. However, this great optimism was very short lived. The holiness movement enjoyed a brief period of significant growth (which contributed to an optimistic outlook) due to the revivals in Vineland, New Jersey in 1867. However, the American context weighed on the hearts of holiness people. The migration to cities from the farms, the flood of immigrants (many of whom were Catholic), industrialization, and the continuing emergence of science (which seemingly opposed biblical truth) created a pessimistic atmosphere for all Christians, including holiness Christians. The overall secularization of America removed the hope that once ran forcefully through the mind of the American Christian.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the holiness leaders embraced this shift and found an outlet for it through dispensational premillennialism. Watson's publication on the book of Revelation, *Steps to the Throne and Holiness Manual*, dripped with dispensational teaching and pronounced his conversion from postmillennialism to premillennialism. Accordingly, Watson identified the experience of being sanctified as the real qualification for being a part of the secret rapture. With this twist, people had even more reason to seek holiness immediately.

Martin Wells Knapp radicalized this line of reasoning by suggesting that Revelation was the basic story of the holiness people living in the world, waiting for Christ to bring them to heaven.<sup>30</sup> While other theologians were still open to different eschatological opinions, a new attitude was forming that equated postmillennialism with heresy. L. L. Pickett, as

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<sup>28</sup>Lennox, 214.

<sup>29</sup>Harold Raser, "Views on Last Things in the American Holiness Movement," in *The Second Coming: a Wesleyan Approach to the Doctrine of Last Things*, edited by H. Ray Dunning (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995), 168-175.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 181.

well as Watson, claimed that postmillennialism was invented by Catholics and “liberals.” Finally, there was the charge that postmillennialists reject a large part of God’s word, leaving very little reason for holiness people to embrace anything but dispensational premillennialism.

### **A New Dispensationalist-Holiness Hermeneutic**

While Phoebe Palmer certainly paved a path for premillennialism’s entrance into holiness thinking, a new generation of holiness leaders laid out the red carpet for dispensationalism. W. B. Godbey’s commentary on the New Testament is a prime example. While conventional wisdom suggests starting such a series with Matthew, Godbey opted to start with Revelation. This choice shows the importance Godbey placed on the matter of the Second Coming.

In his introductory chapter, Godbey uses all the familiar dispensationalist terminology, “Antediluvian world,” “Patriarchal Dispensation,” “Mosaic Dispensation,” and “Apostolic Age.”<sup>31</sup> He believed that the “prophetical river [the Gospel] actually broadens out into the glorious millennial kingdom, flooding the world with . . . final judgment, fiery sanctification . . . and finally celestialization of this world.”<sup>32</sup> This final phrase promotes the idea that holiness people are the “chosen ones” because of their emphasis on sanctification.

Interpretively, Godbey had three key hermeneutical tools. First, he relied on the book of Daniel in interpreting Revelation. He emphasized the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit over against “human authorities.” Finally, Godbey uses the “symmetrical arrangement” (i.e., Scripture interpreting Scripture). By employing such tools, holiness preachers and laity became more comfortable with the “logical” outcome, dispensationalism.

Picking up on this theme in a more academic manner was Professor H. Lummis, a Methodist minister and teacher. Lummis was present at the New York City premillennial conference of 1878. He presented an essay that was included in the conference publication titled “The Kingdom and the Church.”<sup>33</sup> While this conference was typical in that it was dominated by Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists, it nonetheless was graced by the presence of multiple Methodists. All of the following men

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>33</sup>H. Lummis, “The Kingdom and the Church,” in *Second Coming of Christ. Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference, held in the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City* (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1879).

signed the call for the conference: J. Parker from South Second Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, New York; Jesse Gilbert, a Methodist Pastor from Newark, New Jersey; George Hall and Henry Foster from Clifton Springs, New York; T. W. Harvey from Chicago, Illinois; and W. E. Blackstone from Oak Park, Illinois.<sup>34</sup> Their presence and support challenges the notion that the main body of the Methodist Episcopal Church was strictly postmillennial at the time. Furthermore, while these men were Methodist, it is possible that many had holiness sympathies. This is at least confirmed in the case of W. E. Blackstone, one of the most influential proponents of dispensationalism in the holiness movement.

Lummis provides an element very familiar to the Holiness Movement, immediacy. His “exegetical” exposition of biblical passages expresses basic dispensationalist beliefs. He expounds on the Jews failure to recognize the Messiah. He uses this to prod Christians to avoid stalling their expectancy of the Second Coming.<sup>35</sup> He reinforces the notion that holiness people are those in the last days, holy and waiting for the Lord. Through his incorporation of premillennialism and basic holiness identifications, Lummis creates additional forces that draw the holiness people to dispensationalism.

## **Conclusion**

The holiness movement is often characterized solely by their views of sanctification. However, after the Civil War and into the twentieth century, the holiness movement began to coalesce with other movements for pragmatic reasons. The holiness movement’s path to dispensationalism does not follow a direct line, nor was the holiness movement ever willing to remove entire sanctification as the central component of its identity. Palmer’s influence in shaping the theological framework for the holiness movement is highly responsible for its susceptibility in regard to alternative theologies. Her basic focus was ontological; she wanted the holiness people to experience the events of the Bible. This included the behavioral practices (such as abstaining from sexual immorality, drunkenness, etc.), the second blessing (as found in Pentecost without the emphasis on speaking in tongues), and eventually the Second Coming of Christ.

Palmer’s greatest contribution to the path of dispensationalism was her altering of Wesley’s theology of sanctification. Wesley specifically preferred the phrase “perfect love” because perfect love requires an

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>35</sup>Lummis, 179.



object. Perfect love is directed toward God and toward one's neighbor. Palmer's phrase "the holy life" individualizes the state of entire sanctification, thus contributing to the privatization of Christianity. Her emphasis on the immediacy of sanctification created a new component which has stayed with the holiness movement to the present day. The component of immediacy became ingrained in the minds of the holiness people and was used to interpret the Bible. Combining immediacy with biblicism, as Palmer did, identified holiness people as "Bible Christians."

The common sense reading of the Bible, which was espoused by the Holiness Movement and was a main component of the populist hermeneutic, further defined what kind of "Bible Christians" the holiness people would become. There was one right way to read the Bible, literally. The practice of literal readings, and the assumption that the Bible is easily understood, fostered a specific interpretation of Revelation that gave credence to a dispensationalist worldview. The holiness people could identify with Revelation. They were holy. They experienced grace beyond justification. They were the church foretold in the Book of Revelation. Their experiential reading of the Bible contributed to the idea that they were the holy ones waiting for the return of Christ.

Because of the habit of reading the Bible literally, established by Palmer, the dispensationalists offered the holiness movement an ally in the face of higher criticism. Because of the common sense reading of Scripture, the dispensationalists were able to claim biblical authority when teaching about prophecies. Because of the experiential lens used in reading the Bible, dispensationalists were able to convince the holiness movement that they would be able to experience the rapture spoken of in 1 Thessalonians and Revelation. Because the Holiness Movement was unable to appropriate its original teaching for a new context, it had to outsource its theological commitments. Who would come to its rescue? It could not be the newly formed Pentecostals who had no structure of their own. It could not be the Presbyterians or Anglicans because of their Reformed commitments. Nor could it be the east-coast academic liberals since they appeared to have a compromised reverence for the authority of the Bible. Rather, the new and exciting teachings of dispensationalism provided the best opportunity to maintain the central role of entire sanctification. It promoted immediacy of conversion and sanctification. It upheld biblical authority. And it provided a way to experience Scripture, albeit in the (near) future. Thus, the path to dispensationalism was multifaceted and serpentine, but it was the path that made the people of the second blessing become the people of the second coming.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Armistead, M. Kathryn, Brad D. Strawn, and Ronald W. Wright, eds. *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 192 pages. ISBN 9781443817332.

Reviewed by Jeffrey T. Barker, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, MA.

This edited volume of essays confirms a society's contribution to a distinct discipline within psychology: the integration of psychology and religion. Simply put, the birth of the *Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology* in 1996 comes of age with this volume. The society began as a response to two critical misgivings in the integration of psychology and religion project. First, the literature was written and governed predominately from a Reformed theological tradition. Second, psychology seemed to be the lead partner in the dance between psychology and theology. In response, the group's organizing impetus was "to engage a 'theology-directed' integration as a methodology in which conversation begins with the questions theology asks and then searches to see if psychology can contribute" (2). Thus, the newly-formed society nuanced the conversation by introducing a Wesleyan theological dance partner and giving this new partner a lead on the dance floor.

In giving Wesleyan theology a leading role in the dance, the text leans heavily on the life and work of John Wesley as an orienting model for the project. Claiming that Wesley's practical divinity "involved attention to whole persons including their living conditions and basic physical needs," the editors situate this project similarly (2). In the first of three sections, "Exploring the Context of Wesleyan Theology and Science,"

two essays introduce the reader to Wesley's life and work. In particular, Wesley's theological anthropology and his view of creation take center stage. This framework guides the forthcoming contributions.

The second section, "Social Science and Wesleyan Theology Interface," illustrates several "dance moves" between Wesleyan theology and various psychological theories. Positive psychology, self psychology, object relations, family systems, moral psychology, and neuroscience highlight unique contributions of a Wesleyan view of human and theory of change for twenty-first century life. Each essay attempts to offer the reader a different perspective from which to see the potential "to live fully and well" (3). This does not presume a singular point of interaction with Wesley. Rather, rich theological questions—sin, humanity, holiness, ecclesiology, belief—invite the authors to reach out for new conversation partners. These psychological contributions hold up a mirror to Wesleyan theology to illumine the complexity of persons and systems rather than reduce, generalize and stereotype the human experience. Such an approach highlights a very fertile soil for further investigation and contribution. These important conversations are just beginning for the young society. However, the vast array of psychological theories presented in this volume may leave the novice in this discussion somewhat dizzy.

The concluding section, "Wesleyan Theology and Science: Dialog, Argument, or Stand-off," implies three potential postures between theology and science. Each of the two essays hints at this, although not as clearly as the section heading might propose. Both essays seem to suggest that a posture of discernment is most critical in the integration between Wesleyan theology and psychology. Ultimately, they admonish the reader to refrain from a "copy and paste" approach to Wesley and to engage in a discerning collaboration. This invitation requires an acknowledgment of one's presuppositions and to continue participating in the project. Here they implicitly invite the reader to step onto the dance floor, even if one is uncomfortable doing so.

From beginning to end, the text attempts to make plain a society's reason for existence. In response to the editors' claim that the Reformed tradition served as the primary theological framework for the integration project, this volume offers an alternate frame of reference: the Wesleyan theological tradition. The desire to follow "the example of Wesley to use all available tools to enable persons to live fully and well" demands the exploration of various psychological theories in conversation with theol-

ogy (3). To this end, some essays are stronger at making explicit the editor's methodological commitment than others.

Additionally, some essays are more accessible to one partner more than the other, whether that be psychology or Wesleyan theology. An inherent challenge in such an integrative project is the need to become "bilingual" between disciplines. Fluency in both theology and psychology becomes a growing necessity. This brings one back to the model offered in the introductory comments. Wesley was an avid reader across disciplines and fields of study. This is no doubt a critical need to carry the society's agenda forward.

Finally, a hint of pragmatism—daring the reader to step onto the dance floor—situates the collection. The editors' introductory claim is that "neither science nor theology counts for anything unless their benefits can be seen in the lives of everyday people" (4). That is, do people live more fully or well? Choreography must become actualized in performance. This conviction pushes merely theoretical contributions to the background in pursuit of conversations that begin and end with the lived experiences of fallen, broken or diseased persons. If the project is about assisting such persons to live fully and well, the text might have offered more concrete situations out of which the integrative project arises.

In the end, the reader will sense the editors' commitment to the society's organizing mission: introducing the Wesleyan theological tradition into the conversation and offering this partner a lead in the dance. In this edited volume, some dances are fluid and refined. Other dances stumble awkwardly, a witness to learning a new dance. Both serve to encourage the reader to step onto the dance floor.

Whiteman, Darrell L. and Gerald H. Anderson (eds.), with forward by David B Barrett. *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*. American Society of Missiology, Series 44. Franklin, TN: Providence House, 2009. 376 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-57736-424-5.

Reviewed by LaVerne P. Blowers, Professor of Christian Missions, Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN.

*World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* is a collection of thirty-one essays by prominent missiologists from the worldwide family of Wesleyan scholars gathered to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Mission Society's founding as an alternative to the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. It is included in the significant American Society of Missiology Series. The volume has been recognized by the International Bulletin of Missionary Research as among the "Fifteen Outstanding Books of 2009 for Mission Studies." The work is edited by Darrell L. Whiteman (The Mission Society's vice president for mission personnel and preparation, its resident missiologist, and past professor of cultural anthropology at Asbury Theological Seminary) and Gerald H. Anderson (director emeritus of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, past president of Scarritt College, Nashville, Tennessee, and one of the founders of The Mission Society). Several contributors are also familiar to readers of this *Journal*, including Howard A. Snyder ("The Missional Flavor of John Wesley's Theology"), William J. Abraham ("Methodism, Mission, and the Market State"), Paul W. Chilcote ("The Mission-Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival"), and A. H. Mathias Zahniser ("Wesleyan Synergism and the Dialogue with Muslims").

The collection examines the Wesleyan spirit of mission from five perspectives. The biblical perspective views the Jesus paradigm from an Asian angle, notably Acts 15 as a case-study for Wesleyan contextualization and Jonah as a model for mission. The theological perspective sees God's prevenient grace at work in the Wesleyan "world parish," whether in Ghana, Latin America, the "market state," the "Catholic Spirit" of global Christianity, or in developing a contemporary theology of religions. The historical perspective reviews the implications of John Wesley's sermon "The General Spread of the Gospel" as the Methodist mission extends first to America and then introduces the mission-church paradigm to places like India, Polynesia, and West Africa through medical

missions, missionaries like J. Waskom Pickett, the raising up of national leaders, and new mission sending agencies. The cultural perspective examines how Wesleyans dialogue with Muslims, Buddhists, and the indigenous poor by using proverbs and stories in oral cultures as evidence of God's prevenient grace in their contexts calling them to salvation and growth in godliness. Finally, there is the strategic perspective of developing ongoing incarnational and holistic strategies as evidenced in Edinburgh 2010 and in the harnessing of leadership from some examples in Kenya, Brazil, and China that demonstrate the need to use "means" for the spreading of the gospel from everywhere to everywhere.

These five perspectives develop some of the major characteristics of Wesleyan missional thought. The implications of a Wesleyan biblical hermeneutic guide missional praxis by emphasizing not only the need for conversion but also for practical holiness. A thread that weaves through the content of each article is Wesley's concept of prevenient grace—that is, the idea that God is already at work in each cultural group revealing and preparing people for God's saving and eventually sanctifying grace. This concept of God's grace provides a theological springboard for developing a wholesome strategy to contextualize the gospel in ways that are understandable by each people group. The Methodist church-mission paradigm outlines a missional ecclesiology that inclusively involves both clergy and laity, both women and men in extending the great "world parish." The Wesleyan holistic mission includes healing of the individual body and soul, thus involving not only medical and educational mission efforts, but also the restoration of the *imago dei* by evangelistic efforts joining each believer to the Body of Christ in small groups that connect personal holiness/healing with the healing of all creation. The example of engaging diversity from Wesley's own experiences helps to form a backdrop from which the essays develop the possibility of understanding and conversing with the world's great religions.

This volume brings together a rich diversity of Wesleyan missiological scholarship and as such offers a wide range of perspectives that promise to sharpen our focus on the Christian world mission. Whichever of these five perspectives one finds to be of interest, there are seeds of thought that any Wesleyan will find challenging and worthy of consideration. *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* is likely the most comprehensive record of the Wesleyan influence on world missions and evangelism published in the past half century.

Milbank, John and Slavoj Zizek. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009. 312 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0262012713.

Reviewed by Rustin E. Brian, Ph.D., Pastor of Student and Discipleship Ministries, Bentonville Church of the Nazarene, Bentonville, AR.

One of the most important features of Christianity—a feature that is often overlooked—is that it carries with it, and thus requires and purveys, a particular type of logic. Of course, the exact nature of this logic is something that is up for debate. For many, especially those within the Protestant stream of Christianity, this logic takes the form of dialectic: the agonistic back and forth of point-counterpoint, of thesis and antithesis, or the Hegelian triad of thesis, negation, and *Aufhebung*. In this work, Slavoj Zizek does his best to defend dialectical reasoning as the dominant logic at work within Christianity. However, John Milbank argues that “Christian logic has a mediating structure which is *not* dialectical” (145). Rather, he says that the mediating structure of Christian logic is the logic of paradox.

Paradox, as I understand it, might be defined as the coincidence of two seeming opposites in a non-contradictory manner, in which an overall meaning is achieved through a fundamental unity, which is both beyond, and yet contains within itself, all distinction. According to Milbank, the logic of paradox is clearly visible in Roman Catholic and Anglican theology, and therefore allows for a more robust understanding and articulation of the Christian Gospel than that of German Protestantism or Protestantism in general. This work is thus a debate of sorts about the very mediating logic of Christianity: either dialectic or paradox. This book should be most interesting, therefore, to readers from many different theological backgrounds, including Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and especially for those from reform movements such as Wesleyans, for whom there is debate about how to best trace and construct one’s theological heritage.

This work, however, is much more than just a primer in logic or a debate over logical systems. Rather, it is a prime example of the function of logic to uphold an entire system of belief, indeed an entire world. The debate about logic in this book, though fundamental, only lays the bedrock for the real issue at hand: which vision of Christianity is most

true, and therefore, which vision of Christianity can best interpret and thus offer authentic meaning to life itself.

It is worth noting the curious layout of the book itself. Though the book has a very brief introduction, the true substance of the book consists of three large chapters or sections. First is a small introduction, which is aptly titled “Staging an Unlikely Debate” and written by Creston Davis. Davis articulates the impetus behind the book: “to recover or reconnect transcendence with a militant materialism” (4). Toward this end, Milbank and Zizek each attempt to combat their common enemy of “capitalist nihilism” through unique arguments for a logical system that allows for the unity of [transcendental] theology and [immanent] materialism. As the argument unfolds in the rest of the book, it quickly becomes apparent that one of the primary points of contention, or the very center of the entire debate itself, is the use and interpretation of Hegel. For Zizek, Hegel offers the best path toward a robust theological materialism, but for Milbank, Hegel offers nothing more than a seductively tempting dead end to authentic Christian theology.

In the first of the three primary sections of *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Zizek offers a strong defense of a thoroughly Hegelian Christianity, arguing that for reconciliation [in Christ] to be truly affective, it is necessary to have the dialectic interplay between the finite, fragile, and indeed sinful human being, and the infinite, almighty, holy God. Here, as is usually the case with Zizek, he demonstrates extensive use of Freud and especially Lacan. Likewise, Zizek draws heavily on the works of G. K. Chesterton. Milbank does this as well, leaving this reader to admit to not being very familiar with Chesterton’s works, but to also having a newfound keen interest in doing so, especially in *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

In the second of the three parts, Milbank argues for the use of paradoxical logic rather than that of dialectic. Interestingly, Milbank equates paradox with analogy, and also with “real relation,” “realism” (in terms of universals), and with William Desmond’s hugely helpful “metaxological” (112). For Milbank, these positions, grouped under the term “paradox,” allow for a more consistent and robust wholeness or completeness to the gospel, in that the differences between categories such as reason/faith or nature/grace are allowed to play out to their fullest, while at the same time participating in a deeper and more fundamental truth that allows for both by providing meaning to both. As such, for Milbank paradox is not concerned



with completing an argument or finding a winner between two seemingly competing arguments or categories. Rather, paradox allows for the mysterious unity amidst difference that both enhances and yet erodes said difference by being caught up in an ever-greater unity-amidst-difference.

In conclusion, Zizek provides a second chapter, and thus writes two-thirds of the primary text of this work. In this final section, he again argues for the dialectic method, this time specifically against Milbank's articulation of paradox. For Zizek, paradox is simply too vague, too convenient, and does not do justice to his materialist convictions. More curious to me than Zizek's actual argument in this third and final section is the overall method on display in allowing the third and final section to come from Zizek, who writes in contrast to Milbank. Seen as an embodiment of each writer's actual logical position, the book takes on a bit more symbolic meaning. Zizek presents the thesis, Milbank the negation (which is surely not a negation at all, but rather a subsuming argument that refuses to play by Zizek's dialectical rules) and then, after Milbank does not "complete" the argument, Zizek attempts to do that very thing in his *Aufhebung*-esque final section.

Thus, in a very real and calculated way, the book provides a written and tangible example of the difference between dialectical and paradoxical logic. This tangible example provides a glimpse into the distinct visions of Christianity afforded by the two respective logical systems. Dialectical Christianity, it would seem, is concerned with negating false teachings, and, more importantly, with philosophical method and accuracy, whereas Paradoxical Christianity is perhaps a bit more confident in itself, or in its God, to be more accurate. Paradoxical Christianity is comfortable with mystery and with the fundamental peacefulness of God's creation, rather than dialectic's fundamental antagonism. This is surely no revelatory moment, but it is a refreshingly practical and, at the same time, creative display of opposing logical systems.

Finally, let us briefly examine Zizek's "defense" of Christianity. Zizek is well known for his brilliant, startling, and witty reflections on film, literature, advertising, politics, and life itself. Indeed, Zizek is contemporary philosophy's "smoking gun." His critiques come from a Marxist, historical-materialist, Freudian/Lacanian, and atheistic/agnostic (one can never be too sure with Zizek) perspective. Despite this, Zizek is often found to be a proponent of Christianity. Zizek is a very strange and curious bedfellow indeed.

Regardless of whether readers find themselves persuaded more by the argument for dialectic or for paradox, I cannot help but question whether and to what extent Žižek actually aids faithful Christian theology, or whether he, instead, is more of a hindrance. In *The Monstrosity of Christ*, for example, Žižek displays a poor understanding of Roman Catholicism, a less-than-stellar reading of the letters of St. Paul, and, worst of all, very poor Trinitarian theology bordering on Modalism—hence, his defense of Altizer’s Death-of-God Theology (254-268). Sure, Žižek “defends” Christianity or a particular brand of Christianity against some very staunch, powerful critics, but at what cost? I cannot help but conclude that, for Žižek, Christianity *can* be a powerful ally in his struggle against capitalist nihilism, but only if it is subsumed under very powerful materialist and psychoanalytic critiques. Likewise, Žižek surely does not approach Holy Scripture from a position of faith, but rather from a critical, almost disinterested vantage point. Out of this heterodox flavor of Christianity, Žižek discusses Christ as Hegel’s monster or monstrosity: “the exceptional that cannot be accounted for in rational terms alone” (17). Then, in an almost Feuerbachian move, Žižek ends by stating his own desire to become just such a monster:

This is where I stand—how I would love to be: an ethical monster without empathy, doing what is to be done in a weird coincidence of blind spontaneity and reflexive distance, helping others while avoiding their disgusting proximity. With more people like this, the world would be a pleasant place in which sentimentality would be replaced by a cold and cruel passion. (303)

Having come to this most odd and abrupt of conclusions, I cannot help but ask, on behalf of Christianity, the proverbial question, “With friends like Žižek, who needs enemies?”

Kinlaw, Dennis F., with John N. Oswalt, ed. *Lectures in Old Testament Theology*. Francis Asbury Press, distributed by Warner Press, Anderson, Indiana, 2010. Paperback. 493 pages. ISBN: 978-1-59317-542-9.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, Editor of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Emeritus Dean, Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana.

This substantial paperback book consists of thirty-one lectures delivered by Dennis F. Kinlaw in 1993. Now well edited by John N. Oswalt from live classroom recordings, the text has been permitted to retain numerous personal illustrations, parenthetical comments, and even Southern colloquialisms. The style is irenic and, as one would expect from this author so deeply associated with Asbury University and Asbury Theological Seminary, there are clear examples of a Wesleyan theological emphasis in various locations, as well as significant Pietistic touches here and there.

Kinlaw speaks with appreciation of the “magisterial” work of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad in the twentieth century. Although with slightly different emphases, he reports how they both argued for the existence of *an* Old Testament theology. Now Kinlaw does the same, centering the focus of Old Testament theology in the unchanging nature of the transcendent Yahweh. He views the fundamental teaching of the Old Testament, its pervasive base that is still highly relevant to Christians, as the person and activity of Yahweh. For instance, when addressing the covenant and God’s *hesed*, he stresses that the covenant’s heart is not a plan of legal obligations, but “the very character of Yahweh. And that is the character He wants to produce in you and me” (184).

Reminding Christian readers of the great importance of the Old Testament, “the first-century church was founded on the Old Testament” (13), Kinlaw judges that Christians should read this first testament theologically. The place to begin is with the book of Psalms. He recognizes that no “systematic” theology can be found there—such was not the way of the Hebrews in the Psalms or elsewhere. Even so, he argues that we find in the Psalms a people expressing their faith in God out of the full range of their experiences. They are “letting their hearts explode to God for what God has done for them and what they want from God and about their relationship to Him” (88). Despite all the obvious variety involved in the Psalms, Kinlaw’s thesis is that in the Psalms there is “a coherent set of ideas about God, humanity, and the world” (88).

The theological starting point is Yahweh, the Creator God who is God alone, believed to be without competitor in the polytheistic world that surrounded the Jews. The first seven lectures pursue this theological baseline, beginning with “Knowing God” and ending with “The Nature of Yahweh.” Since God is said to have been alone before the act of creation, sovereignty cannot be his highest attribute—after all, God must have been something else before there was anything to be sovereign over. What, then, is it? Kinlaw responds with his own question and answer. “Why do God’s covenant partners behave in certain ways? It is because of the distinctive—*holy*—character of their covenant Lord” (113). Holiness overarches sovereignty, and God’s covenant partners in all times are to come into relationship with God and share in that holiness.

These edited lectures cover a wide range of subjects, including biblical revelation in general, the pivotal role of history in God’s self-revelation, covenant, *hesed*, atonement, cult symbolisms, the demonic, even concluding with a chapter on biblical studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Kinlaw highlights the work of Brevard Childs because of his “attempts to save the Old Testament for us as a practical, working document within the church” (12). This final chapter is followed by an excellent set of indexes, making the book even more accessible and useful. Encountered throughout is a mature biblical scholar, one well acquainted with the Hebrew language and ancient Near Eastern backgrounds. One also encounters obvious “pastoral” concerns, with a highlight on knowing God best in the context of worshipping most sincerely (e.g., the focus of the coherent set of Old Testament theological ideas is said to be found in the book of Psalms). If one takes seriously the foundational nature of the Old Testament for the core concepts of the Christian faith, then one could almost say that this book is capable of functioning simultaneously as an introduction to Old Testament teaching and to beginning Christian theology.

The editor of these lectures has done a superb job in general—and that was not easy when working from recordings of live classroom lectures. One could argue with minor details, of course, like giving excessive space to particular illustrations, including those about Thomas Oden (39-41) and the wife of C. S. Lewis (126-129). But focusing on such minor details lowers one to the “picky” level. This book is substantial in its scholarship, well referenced with its many sources, effective in its teaching intent, and at points truly inspiring to one reaching for personal transformation through a genuinely biblical faith.

Schwenk, James L. *Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008. 141 pages. ISBN 13: 978-0810858374.

Reviewed by J. Gregory Crofford, Director, Institut Théologique Nazaréen, Africa Region, Church of the Nazarene.

Much has been made in Wesley studies of the schism between John Wesley and George Whitefield. But have historical theologians overlooked areas where the leaders of the Revival heartily concurred? James Schwenk answers this question affirmatively. While not papering over genuine theological differences between Wesley and Whitefield, he underscores areas of doctrinal and practical agreement, particularly their joint concern to promote what Schwenk calls “experiential religion,” Christian faith characterized by a warm heart rather than cold, rational speculation.

*Catholic Spirit* takes its title from John Wesley’s 1750 sermon of the same name. His sermon was pragmatic, seeking to unify believers of various Christian traditions. James Schwenk’s monograph breathes the same spirit. Following a chapter explaining the historical context of Wesley’s and Whitefield’s ministry, he explores in three subsequent chapters the theme of “common ground.” This included similar stances toward Quakers and Moravians, and—in Wesley’s case—a greater willingness to sift out the “chaff” of perceived Roman Catholic superstitions in order to save the “wheat” from writers like Thomas à Kempis and the Marquis de Renty (77). Although Wesley and Whitefield differed sharply in their view of predestination, their understandings of original sin were compatible. Of special interest was their shared passion to preach justification and the new birth far-and-wide. As Schwenk rightfully notes, these joint concerns are too often given short shrift in narratives that emphasize the drama of discord.

Perhaps because John Wesley’s biography is a well-plowed field, *Catholic Spirit* gives greater attention to the relatively neglected George Whitefield. On the one hand, this work offers details of Whitefield’s self-promoting marketing techniques that highlight the grayer shades of his character. On the other hand, an exchange of letters with Scottish Presbyterian Ralph Erskine in 1741 underscores Whitefield’s admirable ecumenicity. When Erskine demanded that Whitefield seek orders in Erskine’s schismatic “Associate Presbytery,” Whitefield boldly refused, deeming it a distraction from his primary evangelistic task (85). As an

able historian, James Schwenk brings Whitefield to life, deftly portraying his distress throughout the episode.

*Catholic Spirit* draws out some important nuances from George Whitefield's soteriology. Whereas Arminians often label as "Calvinist" any persons whose views approximate those of John Calvin, in the case of George Whitefield, this label deserves clarification. Regarding his view of election, Whitefield admitted no direct influence from Calvin, instead insisting that his Calvinism resulted directly from reading Scripture (100). More importantly, unlike John Calvin, who in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* taught that sanctification followed conversion, Whitefield believed that the new birth was the occasion of both justification and sanctification (41). For his part, John Wesley believed that such an emphasis would cut short the work of God in the heart of the believer, discouraging the individual from "going on to perfection." By the end of their lives, the distance between Wesley's and Whitefield's views on this issue had grown smaller, leading Schwenk to conclude that they "were closer to consensus than many would care to admit" (43).

James Schwenk helpfully provides primary source detail of the eventual reconciliation between the two Anglican clergymen. Through *Journal* entries from John Wesley and excerpts from his letters of the 1750s, a picture of a gradually warming relationship with George Whitefield emerges. It is gratifying to see an exploration of their *rapprochement* as variegated as the investigations of others focus on their earlier falling out.

Though well-done overall, *Catholic Spirit* suffers from some deficiencies. In a section on the transmission of original sin, the author maintains that John Wesley espoused the "federal head" view, i.e., that Adam was like an elected representative for all subsequent humanity, visiting up his constituents the consequences of a misguided vote. While this was Wesley's position at an earlier point in his theological development, Chris Lohrstorfer established that Wesley eventually adopted traducianism after reading a book by the obscure Henry Woolner.<sup>1</sup> In his recent work on Wesley's theology, Kenneth Collins confirmed that Wesley in the end believed original sin was passed on through procreation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Chris Lohrstorfer, "Know Your Disease, Know Your Cure: A Critical Analysis of John Wesley's Sources for His Doctrine of Original Sin" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, England, 2006), 9.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 68.

Besides this theological correction, two others are of a more practical nature. Schwenk speaks of the close of the nineteenth century as a time when Methodism had made great advances, becoming a “global movement upon which the sun never set” (1). If *Catholic Spirit* were to be purchased by a theological library in English-speaking Africa, this phrase—which recalls the pomposity of British colonialism—might elicit a negative reaction in the reader. Sure to cause confusion is the misprinting in chapter 1, where the pagination skips from page 1 to page 3, then back to pages 2 and 4. No doubt a revised edition will rectify this unfortunate blemish to an otherwise handsomely designed paperback volume.

Despite its shortcomings, *Catholic Spirit* achieves its primary objective. By reviewing the theological common ground shared by John Wesley and George Whitefield as well as their dogged commitment to reconciliation, James Schwenk has provided a welcome corrective to past portraits that have been unduly negative. In our own post-Christian age, it also serves as a timely reminder that what unites us as Christians far outweighs what divides us.

Kostlevy, William. *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive Era America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 240 pages. ISBN 9780195377842.

Reviewed by Benjamin L. Hartley, Associate Professor of Christian Mission, Palmer Theological Seminary, The Seminary of Eastern University, Wynnewood, PA.

A healthy dose of skepticism is often warranted for those who claim the label “radical” for themselves or their favorite group, but for *Holy Jumpers* such skepticism should be set aside. The Metropolitan Church Association, which Kostlevy examines with delightful detail, surely qualifies as radical to the extent that its members truly anticipated a fundamental change to the social order. In the opening chapter, the author provides a succinct comparison of the Metropolitan Church Association and other holiness groups with the Industrial Workers of the World and notes the similarities in recruitment strategies, hymnody, political vision, and millenarian impulse. The radical nature of some parts of the late nineteenth-century holiness movement is a dimension of its identity that still needs to be recovered in holiness movement historiography.

A second historiographical contribution of this book lies in Kostlevy’s conviction that, in order to understand a religious movement such as the Holiness or Pentecostal movements, one ought to understand groups on the margins at least as much as those considered part of the mainstream. Kostlevy does this by a careful examination of the Metropolitan Church Association from the 1890s through the 1930s and the many people and movements with which it associated or against which it competed.

Kostlevy begins by first tracing the genealogy of the MCA from the radical holiness teachings of Michigan Methodist Episcopal pastor Martin Wells Knapp and Quaker premillennialist Seth C. Rees who, in 1897, together formed the International Holiness Union and Prayer League, a radical counterpart to the National Holiness Association that differed in its espousal of premillennial eschatology and strong support for divine healing. The book next discusses the actual formation of the Metropolitan Church Association as it took shape under the leadership of Chicago Methodist Episcopal layman Edwin L. Harvey and pastor Marmaduke Mendenhall “Duke” Farson (both Harvey and Farson were influenced by Knapp and Rees). The Metropolitan Church Association grew out of the



thriving Metropolitan Methodist Church in a Chicago neighborhood now known as West Town located a mile and a half directly west of Moody Bible Institute—an institution with a much different history and whose evening training school began a year after the MCA's own Metropolitan Holiness Training School began in 1902.

Like many radical holiness groups, the MCA seemed to thrive in the midst of controversy. Kostlevy describes in detail its first city-wide revival in Chicago in March of 1901 that brought 2,200 persons to MCA altars. The revival prompted conflict as well as cooperation between the National Holiness Association and MCA leaders. The NHA's General Assembly in Chicago occurred just a few months after the MCA revival and took place just across the hallway from the room where the MCA continued to hold daily noon prayer meetings! Controversy over divine healing, communal living, foreign missions, speaking in tongues, divorce, and a number of other issues filled the pages of MCA periodicals.

The effectiveness of the MCA magazine, *The Burning Bush*, in communicating its ideas about communal living and its muckraking journalism toward opponents in the holiness movement is rightly emphasized in Kostlevy's book. The MCA experiment in communal living was located in Waukesha, Wisconsin. In 1912, more than five hundred persons were in residence striving to fulfill the apostolic teaching to "hold all things in common." The muckraking qualities of *The Burning Bush* are best understood through the illustrations in the magazine; Kostlevy includes a number of plates from *The Burning Bush* to show that the emotional intensity of the Holy Jumpers' revivals was also found in print.

The swirling influence of MCA leaders on other holiness groups and the urban centers of Chicago and Boston in particular through MCA-sponsored revivals makes this a valuable book for students of the Wesleyan movement, American evangelicalism, and urban history. Kostlevy certainly avoids the potential downfalls of analyzing a small sect such as the MCA. The importance of the MCA for the wider Holiness and Pentecostal movements is made clear for the reader. Kostlevy does not get caught up in minutiae as many institutional histories often do, and his rich knowledge of the holiness tradition is evident in this book as he does an especially good job of placing the radical MCA in the wider context of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, the Church of the Nazarene, and mid-twentieth century evangelicalism. Students of Methodism will find this a particularly helpful book for examining a side of Methodist

history often neglected by historians who stay too close to official denominational sources and fail to examine what can be learned about a denomination from those who left it.

The greatest weakness of this book has nothing to do with its impressive scholarly merits. Rather, this reader found that the absence of chapter subheadings makes the book more difficult to work through than it otherwise could have been. While a superficial criticism, it does impact the readability of the text. This reviewer also would have appreciated a bit more attention to a numerical analysis of the MCA's growth and more detail concerning the status of the holiness movement in Chicago and Boston, the two cities that receive special attention in the book. Nonetheless, the book will make a fine addition in courses on twentieth-century religious history, Pentecostalism, and Methodism. Scholars will find a close examination of the way Kostlevy utilized MCA periodical sources instructive as well. This is an important book.

Lowery, Kevin Twain. *Salvaging Wesley's Agenda: A New Paradigm for Wesleyan Virtue Ethics*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008. 328 pages. ISBN 155635377x.

Reviewed by Richard Heyduck, Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Pittsburg, Texas; Adjunct faculty, Northeast Texas Community College.

Written primarily for academic audiences, this study of John Wesley's moral theology is very different from D. Stephen Long's *John Wesley's Moral Theology* (Kingswood, 2005). Working from the Holiness tradition, Lowery reconfigures Wesley's doctrine of perfection in order to overcome the weaknesses and incoherencies that have arisen since Wesley, particularly a tendency toward legalism and an insistence that perfection is an event.

Perfection in Wesley, and in the model Lowery develops, is in tension with the doctrine of assurance. Pursuit of and progress in the one hinder the pursuit of and progress in the other. Rather than eliminating these doctrines because of their current weaknesses, Lowery's objective is to identify the weaknesses in Wesley's original versions. He argues that a reformulation of Wesley's doctrines, in the direction of greater cognitivism, will make them more intellectually defensible in our contemporary setting.

Lowery's methodology is very attractive. Two points in particular stand out. First, he insists on understanding Wesley in context. Putting Wesley in context has led him to consider the theological, ecclesiastical, and philosophical influences on Wesley, ranging from Locke, to Law, to Browne. This close examination rightly leads him to see Wesley as very much a figure of the Enlightenment (though I would not minimize his Reformed ties as much as Lowery). Second, Lowery not only considers Wesley's work as an author, but also as an editor. In his comparison of the appropriation and development of the ethical tradition in Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, Lowery examines the way Wesley edited Edwards' *Religious Affections* for publication in the Christian Library.

This work evidenced deep familiarity with John Locke's epistemological and moral thinking, identifying at several stages how Wesley drew from that work directly and indirectly. Wesley's underlying empiricist tendencies, rooted in his Aristotelian sense of logic, made Locke attractive. In spite of Wesley's core empiricism, Lowery's main philosophical critique is that he did not go far enough. Greater empiricism leads to several theological changes.

Perhaps the most obvious shift is a minimization of what Wesley calls the “direct witness” in favor of the “indirect witness.” Moving beyond what Lowery sees as Wesley’s rejection of mysticism, he finds the signs of moral change and progress associated with the indirect witness much more conducive to producing knowledge than the direct witness. Being more amenable to evaluation, the indirect witness is less susceptible to charges of enthusiasm. The turn to the indirect witness is also an expression of Lowery’s desire to naturalize grace, i.e., to identify the workings of grace as much as possible with natural processes. While he insists that God remains free and able to produce moral change and assurance of right standing by supernatural means, God’s usual way of operating is through natural means.

Hand in hand with a more naturalistic account of grace is a rejection of the doctrine of total depravity. Grace is able to arise from what we consider natural, because humans are not completely broken morally. Though Wesley does not make the move, Lowery thinks he could have moved this direction by considering the moral consequences of Locke’s *tabula rasa* theory: people are morally neutral, not depraved, in their origin. In a footnote, Lowery takes this in an interesting direction: “This view of grace proposes that God intervenes for people at the boundaries of their limitations. However, as humanity continues to progress, these boundaries are constantly being pushed back. Therefore, although God is still active in the world and in the personal lives of people, God’s intervention in human affairs has changed over time.” Using the example of how human medical science has progressed, enabling “miraculous” treatments to become routine, he points to God’s role in the moral evolution of humanity (56).

On my first reading of this work, I was most surprised by Lowery’s use of Kant. Lowery recognizes the limitations of using Kant: his nearly complete reduction of religion to morality, his failure to allow room for the love of God in ethics, and his contention that Christ is only a moral exemplar. But just as Kant may be understood as a corrective to the British empiricist tradition, his work in moral philosophy may be a corrective to theological positions like Wesley’s that grew out of that tradition. Kant’s focus on the concept of *duty* provides Lowery with a way to expand Wesley’s definition of sin to include sins of omission. Perfection would then entail greater and purer attention to one’s duty, not merely the avoidance of actions that break divine commands. Combining a Kantian account of duty with his push toward a greater cognitivism is the root of

Lowery's insistence, contrary to the Holiness tradition, that perfection is best understood as a process rather than an instantaneous event.

I was surprised to find no mention of Wesley's General Rules in Lowery's account. The rules are framed epistemologically: "It is therefore expected of all who continue therein [in the Methodist societies] that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, First, by doing no harm . . . Secondly, by doing good . . . [and] Thirdly, by attending to all the ordinances of God."<sup>1</sup> Wesley provides specific examples at each of these three points so that individuals examining themselves may have clarity regarding their standing with God. Considering the General Rules would have strengthened Lowery's case.

Less surprising, given the Enlightenment context in which Lowery situates Wesley, is the individualism of his account. Though Lowery mentions the instituted means of grace, he gives much greater attention to the prudential means of grace. On my reading, Wesley is more balanced on this regard. In fact, Wesley's emphasis on the role of the church and Christian community in salvation is a key element differentiating him from others in the Enlightenment. Lowery is led this direction by his insistence on naturalizing grace, since the prudential means fit more neatly in such a framework. Naturalizing and cognitivizing the grace in the Lord's Supper, for instance, would be difficult.

Another consequence of Lowery's push to naturalize grace, is a rejection of ontological dimensions of perfection. If we can only use "ontological" in the sense that there is some physical or material object within us, then Lowery's rejection is justified. But if we move beyond the modern philosophy of Locke and Kant to the postmodern position of someone like Heidegger, we can develop an account of the ontological nature of sin that *is* defensible, not only from a philosophical perspective, but also from the perspective of the Christian tradition.

Future work in Wesleyan ethics, particular in relation to the doctrine of Christian perfection, will want to consider Lowery's arguments. However, I suspect that his careful reading of Wesley's context will be more welcome than his Enlightenment-based reconstruction of the tradition.

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<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle upon Tyne," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, vol. 9 of The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (ed. Rupert E. Davies; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 70-73.

Abraham, William J. *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief*. 98 pages. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010. ISBN 9781602582460.

Reviewed by R. Jeffrey Hiatt, Affiliate Professor of Theology and Formation and Practical Theology, Asbury Theological Seminary; Adjunct Professor of World Religions and Christian Ministries, Lindsey Wilson College; and Secretary, Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements.

*Aldersgate and Athens* opens a window to analyze the pitfalls and promises of an interconnected relationship between reason and Christian religious experience. William J. (Billy) Abraham tackles this complicated and salient material with humor, expertise, and deep devotion. His pithy, erudite comments highlight the importance for sorting out how the connections of the intellect and faith of the individual form in the context of the (thought) life in the church and the surrounding culture. In an apologetics mode, Abraham addresses the subject matter, giving a feeling of glass and steel contemporary architectural design, by offering sound arguments to support his claims. As a philosopher of religion, and a Wesley scholar of first rank, Abraham engages philosophically, theologically, and logically to demonstrate the validity of the interconnectedness of both the world of reason and the heart of Christian devotion.

The purpose of *Aldersgate and Athens* seems clear: “[W]e are seeking to come to terms intellectually with the presence of God in our midst. We are about the business of loving God with all our minds” (40). This book, based on lectures Abraham delivered in Singapore to a Methodist audience, discusses John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience and employs three arguments to demonstrate the plausibility of certainty in Christian belief. Abraham works his way through the technical jargon and the thought forms of Wesley’s mind (and era) to distill three central themes that form the first three of four chapters in this brief treatise. He also supplies short explanatory technical comments in the endnotes, and a succinct select bibliography for further exploration of some of the more complicated material.

Chapter one details the argument from the fulfillment of the promises of God, noting the importance of the personal experience of conversion. Chapter two expounds on the direct experience of God, especially the inward witness of the Holy Spirit and one’s own perception of the divine (28). Chapter three delineates the testimony from the power of

God, manifested in “conspicuous sanctity,” miracles, and other charismatic phenomena “to play a legitimate part in cumulative case arguments for the truth of Christian doctrine” (43). Abraham’s fourth chapter consists of Wesley’s view of divine revelation and the “radical epistemizing of Scripture,” providing the case to see how epistemic concentration of Scripture offers the proper criteria for our claims for what counts as evidence; it is the norm for the other norms (69).

Wesley’s intellectual contributions and historical importance provide the grist to Abraham as he seeks both to improve Wesley’s arguments and to redeploy them in the contemporaneous context (55). Abraham contends that Wesley’s argument from conversion exhibits God as a personal agent and asserts that explanatory hypotheses for phenomena in the world may be broadened beyond the confines of scientific explanation to include personal explanation as well (56, 79). Abraham explicates Wesley’s view of experience of God, using Plantinga (31), Alston (33), and Moser (37ff) to highlight the timeliness of Wesley’s points concerning the emphasis on the moral transformation brought about by “filial knowledge of God” for current dialogs (37) to rebut the antagonistic covered ideological agendas of notables like Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Lorraine Code (59). Abraham dismisses Wesley’s cautious stance of the evidential value of miracles. He supports the validity of charismatic phenomena and suggests that skepticism and resistance to the evidence are to be expected given the “noetic effects of sin” (58). Abraham notes that, for Wesley and for the contemporary Christian, Scripture becomes the overriding authority in matters of faith, since divine revelation establishes it as the litmus for competing norms, rejecting what is inconsistent with its character and intent (69, 79).

*Aldersgate and Athens* offers insights for scholars and students with an interest in philosophy of religion and Wesley studies in particular (as the title suggests), but covers basic Christian doctrine as well. It signals a deep connection between the affective and the cognitive elements of the Christian life so evident in Wesley’s ministry. Abraham’s cogent thesis reminds the church and the academy, the practitioner and the theoretician to maintain this interactive relationship of heart and mind. Reflection on the extent of human cognitive powers disordered by sin and reordered by grace encourages believers to live in the new world of faith, exhibiting the love and holiness of God as they go forth to love and serve the world (79). In this way, knowledge and vital piety are re-linked, and the purity and power of God both prompt and empower the Christian’s words, thoughts and works.

Evans, Christopher H. *Liberalism without Illusion: Renewing an American Christian Tradition*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-1602582088.

Review by William Kostlevy, Professor of History and Political Science, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas.

The demise of Christian liberalism is unquestionably one of the most notable events of the last half of the twentieth century. In the late 1940s and early 1950s with liberal seminaries packed, notable liberal and main-line congregations thriving and engaged in massive building expansions, few could have anticipated the day when the term “liberal” would be within two generations avoided like the plague. In *Liberalism without Illusion*, Christopher H. Evans defines, critiques, and provides a vision for the renewal of Christian liberalism. For the heirs of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement who share far more in common with Christian liberalism than they commonly acknowledge, this insightful book raises important questions and challenges that Wesleyans ignore at their own peril.

Evan’s basic argument is simple. “There are resources within American liberalism that reflect upon the possibility of reviving a larger holistic tradition of American Christianity that is faithful to the past heritage of the church, while looking with hope for the future” (31-32). However, Evans argues that the recovery of Christian liberalism requires an understanding of its history, an honest assessment of its historic limitations, and an engagement with American society as it is and not as many liberals wish it were.

*Liberalism without Illusion* begins with a realization that, in spite of the rhetoric of religious pluralism to the contrary, “Americans overwhelmingly identify themselves as Christians and the dominant flavor of Christianity comes from the historic reservoir of American evangelicalism” (24). In fact, as Evans points out in his very effective second chapter, nineteenth-century Christian liberals were “evangelical and modern.” It was a liberal evangelical, Charles Sheldon, who raised the question still asked among evangelicals of all stripes, “What would Jesus do?”

Not surprising for the biographer of Walter Rauschenbusch, Evans identifies the social gospel as liberal Christianity’s greatest achievement. Far from ending with the Progressive Era in America’s retreat from reform during World War I, Evans sees its legacy continuing in the



thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and as the primary inspiration for the Civil Rights Movement, especially in the thought and actions of Martin Luther King, Jr. As Evans rightfully insists, first generation social gospel figures remained profoundly evangelical even while showing considerable “skepticism toward inherited tradition” (54).

For Evans, the renewal of Christian liberalism requires that it admit the obvious. It is Christian and it is profoundly evangelical with roots in the Christian Scriptures and Christian traditions. Like the golden age of liberalism when it was centered in actual local congregation under ministers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, George Buttrick, E. E. Tittle, and Ralph Sockman, liberalism needs to reclaim its heritage as a lived faith rooted in actual faith communities. Further, liberalism’s current strongholds in educational institutions and association with philosophical movements, such as liberation and process theology, tend to divorce it from the common language of Christian tradition and Christian theology.

Liberalism has been at its best, Evans notes, when it has not backed away from being both religious and culturally relevant. In this regard, Evans notes that the liberalism commonly associated with figures like John Shelby Spong is largely negative. Spong is far more certain about what he does not believe than what he does believe. As Evans notes, unlike bishop Spong, the chief representatives of an earlier liberalism “understood the power of Christian conversion” (129). One of the most refreshing elements in this book is Evans’ call for liberals to take time to understand evangelicalism and engage in honest dialogue with its representatives.

Evans is particularly effective in defending Christian liberalism from three standard charges: that it (1) elevates personal experience over the weight of Christian tradition, (2) downplays the reality of sin, and (3) naively affirms the possibility of human perfectibility. As Evans correctly notes, Protestantism itself tends to make the experience of individuals determinative. In the end, Evans assures us that “like any other tradition of Christian theology, the history of American liberalism does not lead us to a new heaven on earth” (32).

In part, this is appropriate in a work that correctly places Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr in the liberal camp and even suggests that Walter Rauschenbusch was too hopeful about the possibility of the perfectibility of the social order. Evans, like all liberals, is particularly uncomfortable with the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith. In part, this highlights one of Christian liberalism’s deepest ironies. As a tradition rooted

in the belief “that the pursuit of a just world was the ultimate mission of Christianity,” it remains deeply wedded in a real sense to an affirmation of the world as it is. Even many of the nineteenth-century evangelicals affirmed in this work, such as Horace Bushnell, were profoundly conservative culturally. Bushnell opposed women’s rights and struggled with the social radicalism of the evangelism of Charles G. Finney. In effect, liberals want a slightly improved and reconditioned earth, while evangelicalism at its best builds new earths amid a fallen world without abandoning the visions of ancient Hebrew prophets that a community of peace and justice upon a renewed earth is the actual future of humanity. As a result, it is not surprising that evangelical radicals like Charles G. Finney, B. T. Roberts, or the more recent E. Stanley Jones are not to be found in this book.

Wesleyans, even the heirs of the Holiness Movement, have long been attracted to liberalism. We have affirmed personalism, and more recently liberation and process theology, with a degree of enthusiasm. As an example, long after others had retreated from the thought of Parker Borden Bowne, Eastern Nazarene College’s Bertha Munro was still insisting that the central emphasis of personalism, the sacredness of human personality, was a foundational Christian belief. In other words, what makes this book of particular relevance to readers of this journal is that the crisis of identity sweeping through liberal Christianity, if it is already not upon us, is very likely our future.

In conclusion, Evans is one of the truly outstanding historians of American Christianity. This book provides a rich feast for anyone who cares about the future of the church and our society. Even a chiliastic perfectionist like this reviewer desires the renovation of the movement that led to the integration of baseball and the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. If Christian liberalism can experience renewal, maybe the American Holiness Movement can as well.

Leithart, Peter J. *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. 373 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0830827220.

Reviewed by Jackson Lashier, Affiliate Professor of Church History, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY; Adjunct Professor of Theology, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

Few historical figures have occasioned the amount of scholarly attention in the past forty years as has Constantine. Among theologians, Wesleyans included (notably Stanley Hauerwas), that attention has been almost exclusively negative. Indeed, the now normative account identifies Constantine as the primary reason behind the Church's so-called "fall" or "shift" from early Christian principles, namely pacifism and rejection of empire. Into this milieu, Peter J. Leithart's *Defending Constantine* offers a fresh portrait of the embattled emperor. While the bulk of the work is biographical, at its heart is a theological critique aimed against theologians whose negative evaluations of Constantine and the concomitant account of a "Constantinian shift," Leithart argues, are based on shoddy historical work. In contrast, Leithart is a careful historian who presents Constantine as a flawed, but genuine Christian who leaves a positive mark on Christian history and is, thus, instructive to current political theologies.

Leithart's thorough biography of Constantine consumes the first eleven chapters. While he offers no new historical insights (his footnotes read as a summary of the scholarship of Constantinian specialists), the freshness of Leithart's historical account lies in his ability to interpret Constantine's actions sympathetically, as opposed to the normative account (for which John Howard Yoder plays the culprit), which finds hidden motives of power behind every move. For Leithart, Constantine's actions from 312 on are better explained by a genuine conversion and an ensuing effort to bring the Roman Empire into conformity with his theological understanding—"the Christian God was the heavenly Judge who, in history, opposes those who oppose him" (82)—a political theology that, although previously applied to pagan gods, was standard in ancient Rome.

Accordingly, Constantine tries to gain God's favor by ending persecution and restoring Christian property. He "Christianizes" public space by building lavish churches. He bases significant portions of his law

codes on Christian principles. Most importantly for Leithart, Constantine moved toward the complete outlawing of sacrifices, first signified by his own refusal to offer a sacrifice to Jupiter upon conquering Maxentius. Moreover, Constantine's genuine faith best explains his actions with the Donatist and "Arian" controversies. In both cases, Leithart observes, Constantine was first invited by bishops to intervene. And in both cases, he only endorses bishops' decisions to secure Christian unity. In Leithart's judgment, accounts of Constantine's influence, particularly at Nicaea, have been overstated.

Although it moves against the scholarly grain, Leithart's sympathetic account is plausible for several reasons. First, he carefully arranges the biographical material to portray Constantine in the best possible light. For example, Leithart places the pejorative account of Constantine's "murder" of his son Crispus and his wife Fausta (often the centerpiece of the normative account) in the context of his chapters on the law code suggesting that, far from murdering family members, the emperor merely applied his own laws and consequences to his adulterous son and wife. Leithart also displays an innovative ability to turn potentially damning historical facts into occasions supporting Constantine's genuine faith. Whereas some scholars, for example, have read Constantine's efforts to promote church unity as a play for power, Leithart connects these efforts with New Testament admonitions for Christian unity. And while some have noted the brutality of punishments in Constantine's law code as evidence against his faith, Leithart underscores who the laws were protecting, namely, women, the poor, and the outcast (biblical principles to be sure).

Finally, Leithart consistently reads Constantine's motives and actions from a fourth-century perspective. This would not be so noteworthy except that it is almost never done, particularly by theologians pushing the "Constantinian fall" narrative. For example, Leithart details the brutality of Diocletian's persecutions to help the reader understand the enthusiasm with which Christians such as Eusebius embraced Constantine. He notes against those who charge that Constantine should have kept Christianity and empire separate that political regimes in the ancient world were always sanctioned by the gods and governed by a motive to please them. Leithart's entire book is framed by Diocletian's "failed sacrifice" to Jupiter to underscore the centrality of sacrifice in ancient Rome which, in turn, enables the reader to better grasp the gravity of Constantine's rejection of sacrifices.

However, Leithart fails to address adequately some historical facts, likely because they do not fit his sympathetic picture. He says little about Constantine's baptism and death, and he inexplicably gives more space to legendary accounts than historical facts. Constantine's baptism by Eusebius of Nicomedia is credited to an accident of history as opposed to a signal that Constantine had waived from the Nicene position. In Leithart's reading, Constantine remains a committed Nicene to his death. While that position better supports his contention that Constantine only endorsed bishops' decisions, it does not account for Constantine's later favoring of Eusebius of Nicomedia or his exile of Athanasius (not to mention Constantine's offensive actions in the Donatist controversy, which Leithart nowhere sufficiently reconciles to his thesis that Constantine left the Church unfettered). Still, Leithart's account remains much more historically satisfying than what has passed for history in Yoderian circles for some time.

The result of Leithart's sympathetic reading is an effective polemic against Yoder's reading that, while running throughout the work, takes center stage in the final three chapters. Primarily, Leithart shows that Christians had diverged on the issues of pacifism and empire from the Church's inception. While Leithart's biblical conclusions are questionable (his treatment of the contentious Romans 13 passage is too short to be helpful, and his interpretation of the scriptural narrative through the lens of war is unconvincing), his historical interpretations are not. As Leithart succinctly observes, there is no evidence either way for the Church's stance on pacifism prior to the late second century (Yoder's claims to the opposite effect are inferred from a particular reading of Scripture). When evidence begins to appear, present is always a clear strand of Christian teaching that allows for Christian participation in the army and the empire. Thus, "the church after Constantine took up one thread of earlier teaching, the thread that seemed most relevant to its changed political circumstances" (259). In other words, against those who would argue for a Constantinian shift, Leithart shows continuity. Even the sort of enthusiasm for Constantine exhibited by Eusebius is tempered within a generation by such figures as Augustine. Leithart's reading of Augustine here is accurate and reveals the significant weaknesses in Yoder's use of Augustine. In all, Leithart's portrait of history before and after Constantine is much murkier, and therefore much closer to reality, than Yoder's historical account.

In the final chapter, Leithart offers Constantine as a model for a new Christian political theology. Unfortunately, Leithart overextends himself as he attempts in chapter length what should be, perhaps, a second volume. While he makes a strong case that a Christian emperor and regime are possible (Yoder denies such a possibility), he fails to show how it could be feasible in an increasingly post-Christian world. Still, much of the final chapter remains a strong conclusion to a well-argued and well-written monograph. Throughout the work, Leithart is able to navigate Roman history, Church history, theology, and ethics with ease. The result is a landmark work that ought to temper some of the theological claims offered against Constantine and the so-called “Constantinian shift.” In particular, Wesleyans who have been influenced by a “Hauerwasian” ethic and ecclesiology will find much in this book that challenges their assumptions of fourth-century history and, perhaps, some subsequent theological claims.

William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Revisiting Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6238-9.

Reviewed by K. Steve McCormick, William M. Greathouse Chair for Wesleyan-Holiness Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary.

*Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* offers a fresh and bold vision for the renewal and unity of the church. This proposal is a “long-haul, intergenerational project” that attempts to recover the rich canonical heritage of the church by rediscovering the abundant treasure house of canonical gifts that the Holy Spirit has lavished upon the church to restore humankind to the image of the Triune God.

This volume is a collection of eighteen essays written by eleven scholars from various ecclesial traditions and academic disciplines representing the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. For three years (2002-2005) these scholars met biannually at Perkins School of Theology to explore in “holy conversation” their vision and hope in the well-defined central thesis of *Canonical Theism*.

The central thesis of *Canonical Theism* maintains that the Spirit has bestowed upon the church, not simply a canon of Scripture or a canon of doctrine, or a canon of episcopacy, but a robustly full canonical heritage of materials, persons, and practices developed during the first millennium. Consequently, *Canonical Theism* regards this rich canonical heritage of the church as a “complex means of grace” comprised of many canonical gifts: a canon of Scripture, a canon of doctrine, church fathers, theologians, liturgy, bishops, councils, saints, ecclesial regulations, icons, and so on (cf. *Thesis IX*).

Now, to be absolutely clear about *Canonical Theism*’s vision and thesis, this team of faithful scholars has deliberately chosen to reject the notion of canon as a norm or a criterion, as preferred within the Western church. Instead, by reconsidering the nature of the Gospel and the way in which the *Rule of Faith* has faithfully guided and established the canonical heritage of the church, these writers set out to reclaim the original meaning of canon as a ‘list’ of many canonical gifts (cf. *Thesis XVII*). What then have these canonical theists done? By revisiting the *Rule of Faith* as a way to think about the source and nature of the canonical heritage of the church and all her gifts, they have given us a more faithful way to reframe the most problematic question(s) pertaining to canonical authority as it relates to the nature and mission of the church.

Essentially, by starting with the *Regula Fidei* as preceding canonical authority, these canonical theists have moved us *back* to the central question of Christian discipleship: “Who do you say that I am?” In many ways, Peter’s response reflects the key to the canonical theists’ intent. Peter did not say, for example, “I am tentatively willing to believe that you are who you say you are because my criteria of truth suggest that you are indeed the Christ.” More importantly, for the canonical theists, Jesus told Peter that his confession did not come by flesh and blood but by the authority of the Spirit.

The canonical focus has shifted from *norm* to *list* because of the unshakable conviction that the Holy Spirit constitutes the church with an abundance of gifts, not simply some criterion of truth, and in these canonical gifts of the Spirit’s generosity the character of the Triune God is revealed, determining how we *know* and *love* God. Moreover, as these gifts are filled with the Spirit’s constant indwelling, they become the full canonical means of grace for the Church, a grace that heals and renews humankind into the image of the Triune God. Every canonical gift is a gift *of* God and not simply a gift *from* God, and thus, these canonical means of grace cannot be, by their very nature, merely a norm or a criterion of truth.

The implications of this shift are significant and far-reaching. God and God alone is the criterion of truth. By viewing a canon as a “complex means of grace,” the authors have relocated a canon back into the *being* and *mission* of the church. Moreover, by deeming a canon as a means of grace and not a criterion of truth, they have made the “primary” function of a canon soteriological and not epistemological, so that *all* the canonical means of our ecclesial knowing and loving God work together as the full medicine of the Spirit’s healing to restore the image of God in humankind (cf. *Thesis XI*).

The Spirit who constitutes the one holy, catholic and apostolic church has given all these canonical means of grace for the unity of Christ’s Body. The ecclesial significance of all these complexly interconnected canonical gifts is not that they stand alone, or over and against the other gifts of the Spirit, but that they work together in the Body of Christ for the unity of the church. Every canonical gift of the Spirit functions in an indissoluble unity in the same way that “all of God” was “in Christ” for us and our salvation. Thus, a notion such as the hypostatic union of the *two natures in Christ* helps inform why *Canonical Theism* has concluded that a canon is a means of grace, soteriological to the core.



The Spirit is the giver of the gifts, whose end is the glory of God. For the authors, this means that a canon cannot stand alone or function as a normative “end.” *Scripture alone*, for example, is viewed as an epistemological misstep because it has made the canon of Scripture the end instead of the means. To think of these canonical gifts, such as Scripture, as separate and independently functioning gifts, or even trumping the other canonical gifts, is to make them function as epistemic criteria and not as soteriological means of grace. When the canonical “gifts of God for the people of God”—such as a canon of Scripture, or a canon of episcopacy—are reduced to epistemic criteria of truth, the end result is an ecclesial failure. To make a canon an epistemic criterion is a categorical mistake of ecclesiology. Such a categorical gaffe as this is the primary cause for the continued splintering and divisions in the church. Persistently, these canonical theists insist that the Spirit has given all the canonical gifts as the *necessary* means of grace for our knowing and loving the Triune God in the Body of Christ, the church. The canonical gifts are the means of grace given for the unity of the Church, and they must be used as means of grace and not as epistemic criteria; otherwise, they will continue to be the means of ecclesial division.

The persistent primacy of epistemology over ontology, according to these writers, overlooks the original development of a canon and how each canonical means of grace shaped the growth and development of the other. The episcopacy, for example, does not do the work of baptism, nor does Scripture do the work of the creed, and the icons do not do the work of doctrine, and so on (cf. *Thesis XV*). In similar ways, not one of the quadrants in the Methodist Quadrilateral can stand alone, and neither can any one of the canonical gifts of the church. Just as the means of grace are complex and intertwined, so are our ecclesial ways of knowing and loving God. The interconnections and indissoluble unity of all the canonical gifts of the Spirit work together to give the church what is needed for her healing and renewal.

To sustain such a promising and multifaceted proposal, the book is cleverly laid out in a three-part outline. At its beginning, the volume proposes “Thirty Theses” to explain what *Canonical Theism* means and also what it does not. With such a strategically crafted set of “Theses,” one would be well advised to spend time reading carefully, and reflecting methodically, on each of them before examining the chapters that flesh out these writers’ convictions, rationale, and hope for the renewed unity

of the church. Before appraising the book, read and listen to them as a missional “postlude.” After all, not only do these “Thirty Theses” capture the heart and soul of *Canonical Theism’s* vision for church renewal, they touch the very nerve of what is deemed as the most besetting problem of the church today, namely, the loss of the full canonical heritage. All the canonical gifts are needed.

Once a carefully constructed set of “Theses” has been established, the writers get to the task of faithfully recovering the canonical heritage of the church by rediscovering in *all* the canonical means of grace—the canon of Scripture, the canon of the episcopacy, the canon of the liturgies, the canon of the sacraments, the canon of saints and teachers/theologians, and the canon of icons/images—a richly complex means of grace for healing and renewal. Part I of the book is perhaps the most creative and spiritually formative portion of their proposal. These seven chapters are full of imagination and wise discernment. Here the Spirit is described as descending with healing in her wings to give to the church a *canonical way* back into full communion with God.

In the second section (chapters 10-17), *Canonical Theism* probes deeply into what it believes is the most fundamental problem that has kept the Church from using all the canonical means of grace. According to these authors, a perpetual flood of epistemological theories keeps pouring into the church and eclipsing the very revelation of God. Epistemic certainty has truncated the real meaning and function of a canon as a means of grace. As a corrective to the epistemic hubris that has smothered faith and trust in the wider canonical ways of knowing and loving God, these writers call for a radical decanonization of epistemology. They identify a church where ontology (being/belonging) is made primary.

This does not mean that epistemology can be separated from ontology: “to ‘be’ ‘known’ by God” is to these canonical theists why ontology is primary to epistemology. Specifically, what *Canonical Theism* calls for is a robust Trinitarian doctrine of revelation where the Subject (God) cannot be split from the object in the many ways of knowing and loving God. After all, it is the nature of the Gospel and the salvation that Christ proclaimed that compel these contributors to reorder the priority of ontology over epistemology. That is, since the “way” we know and love God will always be “dependent” upon the God who first knows and loves us, the first order of knowing God *must* always be grounded in the very being of God, in whom we live and move and have our very being.

Once the Trinitarian reasons for the primacy of ontology are developed in the central thesis of the book, some of the thornier issues that demonstrate how the epistemological barbs of division have usurped the soteriological function of the canonical means of grace are then named, identified, and sharply addressed. With the most delicate care and respect for the unity of the church, these ecclesial gardeners begin to prune away the canonical thorns of division. That is, the most divisive of canonical issues—papal infallibility, the authority of Scripture, the Jesus of history, the means of grace, and Evangelicalism—are decanonized. Thus, like epistemology in general, they are rejoined to all the canonical gifts so that they cannot stand alone as criteria of truth nor outmaneuver the other canonical gifts of the church. This section of the book is perhaps the most insightful, as it bores deeply into the problem(s) of epistemology, while demonstrating why all the canonical means of grace are absolutely necessary to our ecclesial ways of knowing and loving God. As the authors conclude, no canon alone—doctrine, Scripture, or even episcopacy—can heal the church. All the canonical means of grace are needed.

The final section of the book (chapters 18-20) returns to a vision for church renewal and addresses implications for what this may mean in the areas of systematic theology, theological education, and the life of the church. In these concluding three chapters, the authors revisit ways in which theological education, systematic theology and the life of the Church are no longer shaped by the vocational identity and calling that are nurtured by the canonical heritage of the church. Catechesis and formation should be central to the work of the theologian in service to the church. Once again, however, the epistemic hubris of the academy has subverted the church's means of faithfully knowing and loving God. The authors' intent is not to separate the wheat from the tares in these areas; rather, it is a call to revisage God in all the Spirit's gifts. The suggestions and corrective leanings in these concluding chapters move in step with the primary vision of the project, and do much to keep moving the church toward the unity for which Christ prays and calls us. *Canonical Theism* is a means of grace toward that end.

*Canonical Theism* has attempted to reassert the Spirit and her gifts. They are grounded in the nature and activity of the Triune God. These canonical theists have recovered the source of our faith and Christian identity so that the church can rediscover her *canonical way back* to knowing and loving God.

Meadors, Gary T, ed. *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*. Counterpoints Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009. 371 pages. ISBN-13: 9780310276555.

Reviewed by Mitchel Modine, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines.

Precisely how the Bible, composed over a millennium several millennia ago, remains relevant is a perennially important question. *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, edited by Gary Meadors, tackles this question directly. The book is structured as follows: after a brief introduction by the editor, representatives of each of four views lay out their respective positions, followed by responses from the three other principal contributors. The book concludes with three responses to the entire discussion, making specific recommendations for moving forward in light of the issues identified.

Walter Kaiser's "principalizing model" (19-73) follows one of the typical emphases of historical-critical scholarship to establish a bridge between the meaning of the text in its original context(s) and its contemporary significance. Some postmodern theorists might call the latter a new meaning constructed between the text and the reader. However, the difference seems to be more a matter of emphasis than anything substantial. Kaiser develops Gadamer's familiar dual-horizon model by adding a third horizon or, more properly, separating the horizon of the reader into two parts: "the culture of the interpreter, and . . . the culture of the receptor" (20). The principal—pun intended—metaphor Kaiser offers is something he calls "the Ladder of Abstraction" (25). He uses as an example Paul's reinterpretation of Deuteronomy 25:4 in arguing for pastoral remuneration (1 Cor 9:9-12; 1 Tim 5:18). The first rung on the ladder is the "*ancient specific situation*" (25, emphasis original here and following) which, in this case, is a somewhat obscure agricultural law. From there "we move up the ladder to *the institutional or personal norm* (animals are God's gift to humanity and should be treated kindly), to . . . *the general principle* (giving engenders gentleness and graciousness in those mortals who care for . . . those who serve them)" (25). After having developed this metaphor, Kaiser then goes on to apply it to five specific ethical situations: euthanasia, women in the church, homosexuality, slavery, and abortion and embryonic stem cell research.

Daniel Doriani's "redemptive-historical model" (75-149) operates under the assumptions that biblical exegesis is just as much art as science, and that the care with which it is done will often depend on the personal commitment of the exegete to the truth of Scripture. He unambiguously places himself within a particular tradition of evangelical Protestantism when he writes: "Because we believe Scripture has a divine Author who inspires the human author, the discovery of the first Author's message obligates the ideal reader to believe and do certain things as a result, even if that should prove difficult" (76). Doriani goes on to maintain that, whenever cultural mores or theological systems have a problem with something in Scripture, culture or theology must change. Doriani seems, then, to treat the Bible as a so-called "strict constructionist" would treat the U.S. Constitution. Whatever a given biblical writer might say on a given topic that has come up since the closing of the canon, the data set of the biblical interpreter is what the biblical writers *did* say on any number of topics. Doriani offers several steps of interpretation according to his methodology: "close, accurate interpretation . . . synthesis of biblical data . . . application of Scripture . . . adjusting a traditional view of application" (84-86). For Doriani, interpreting the Bible is, quite simply, asking the right questions. He applies his model to the questions of gambling, safe architectural practices, and women in ministry.

Kevin Vanhoozer's "drama-of-redemption model" (151-213) is the most enjoyable to read because it is the least burdened by traditionally precise technical theological language. He states his position even more clearly than Doriani does: "My own view is that theological interpretation of Scripture—reading the Bible in the church to hear God—is a joint project. . . . Being biblical is ultimately an ecclesial rather than an academic project" (154). Thus Vanhoozer is somewhat close to Doriani in that he avers that biblical interpretation is a matter of the church for the church. Though Vanhoozer's presentation may shy away from rigorous language, this may be in fact where its value lies: the jettisoning of jargon in favor of more clearly understandable—and, hence, more clearly applicable—statements for ethical reflection. Vanhoozer's wide reading and his interest in drama provide a fresh and interesting approach, which he then applies to two topics: the doctrine of Mary in Christian theology and spirituality, and transsexuality or transgendered persons. On the former, Vanhoozer comments that when "evangelicals display negative attitudes toward Mary, they are not performing the script but reacting to the tradi-

tion of Marian interpretation” (191). On the latter, he comes down strongly for the traditional view: “The irony, as with all sin, is that in trying to find oneself, one loses oneself. Those who seek to rewrite their roles make God a bit player in a drama that exchanges the gospel for the pottage of self-determination” (197).

William Webb’s “redemptive-movement model” (215-270) is, of the four, seemingly most willing to move beyond the Bible, though he takes this phrase in a particular way. In other words, he draws a familiar, if somewhat misunderstood, distinction between the time- and culture-specific elements of the Bible and its enduring significance. He believes that Scripture contains within itself the ways in which interpreters may move beyond it. Webb is essentially calling for not only an exegesis of Scripture and its cultural assumptions, but also of the cultural assumptions of readers and interpreters. This redemptive-movement model stresses, on the one hand, the “improvement” the Bible’s on-the-page ethical statements make over the surrounding historical/cultural contexts and, on the other, that some biblical “practices are problematic and in need of a movement toward an ultimate ethic” (226). On both sides of the equation, one sees that there is a “*redemptive movement as a crucial meaning within the biblical text*” (227, emphasis original). After demonstrating how his model interacts with biblical texts concerning slavery and corporal punishment, Webb devotes a significant portion of his essay to correcting certain misconceptions of his view, a sure sign that he has taken a lot of fire during the course of his career.

On the whole, this volume offers a view into a current lively debate. In the conclusion, the editor maintains that the “series typically presents debated issues that have become relatively settled in their theological viewpoints. This volume is a bit of an exception. How authoritative Scripture is relevant is a current center-stage discussion in both the academy and the church” (347). However, there are some features of this work that limit its value for those who find themselves within Wesleyan theological circles. First, all of the authors are connected in one way or another with the Reformed wing of Protestant evangelicalism. It would be desirable to hear from other voices within what is surely a much larger tent. Nevertheless, Wesleyans may find this collection’s conversation helpful in evaluating positions regarding the Bible that are often espoused in Wesleyan contexts but that ultimately reflect Reformed rather than Wesleyan thought. Second, that each author applies his method to different topics nearly ren-

ders impossible any direct comparison between them. Readers could appreciate the rather subtle distinctions between the authors' positions and approaches had they applied their messages to the same two or three topics. Finally, the editor confesses that there was a "post-production" title change that creates some confusion for the reader: "The original working title for this book used the phrase 'beyond the sacred page' rather than 'beyond the Bible.' The authors use the original phrase a great deal because their work was completed prior to a [*sic*] title change. . . . These phrases are intended to be equivalent" (17). While the phrases may in fact be equivalent, it indicates, in the reviewer's judgment, a subtle failure in editing that could have guided the reader along regarding the work's objectives.

Thorsen, Donald A. and Steve Wilkens. *Everything You Know About Evangelicals Is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider's Look at Myths and Realities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010. 264 pages. ISBN: 9780801079076.

Reviewed by R. David Rightmire, Professor of Historical Theology, Asbury University, Wilmore, Kentucky.

This co-authored work seeks to define evangelicalism in an accessible manner by what it is not, believing that certain caricatures which persons commonly link to this movement are not essential to its essence. After a helpful introduction to the “History, Agenda, and Caricatures” of evangelicalism, Thorsen and Wilkens identify and critique characteristics that, although present within segments of the movement, are not central to its core identity. Chapter titles reveal the stereotypes that the authors seek to refute: “Evangelicals Are Not All . . .”: “Mean, Stupid, and Dogmatic” (chap. 2), “Waiting for the Rapture” (chap. 3), “Anti-evolutionists” (chap. 4), “Inerrantists” (chap. 5), “Rich Americans” (chap. 6), “Calvinists” (chap. 7), “Republicans” (chap. 8), or “Racist, Sexist, and Homophobic” (chap. 9).

An implicit theme running through the book is the ambiguity of the term “evangelical.” Thus, Thorsen and Wilkens attempt to define evangelicalism from a “big tent” perspective, providing a broad historical framework for understanding the movement’s diversity, while seeking to identify its unifying core themes. The emphasis of this work, however, is on the problem of defining evangelicalism too narrowly, as illustrated by the inadequacies of the caricatures discussed in chapters two through eight. Although the authors devote a good portion of their work to a critique of certain aspects commonly identified with evangelicalism by those outside and inside the movement, they make clear from the beginning that such criticism “grows out of a deep love and appreciation for...a tradition which has nurtured us and to which we remain deeply committed” (10).

A contemporary (sometimes humorous) anecdotal illustration introduces each chapter, which helps to frame the issues to be unpacked. The authors then provide insight into the variety of evangelical positions on the subject at hand. They note that, although there is some truth to the stereotypes associated with evangelicals, these represent neither the essence of evangelicalism nor the consensus of its constituency. So, for example, although demonstrating that sometimes evangelicals are mean,



stupid, and dogmatic (chap. 2), this should not be presumed as central to the identity of evangelicals at large.

The issues addressed in certain chapters had the potential of needing too much technical explanation or theological contextualization, but the authors provided accessible analyses of the variety of positions historically maintained within evangelicalism on such issues as eschatology (chap. 3) and evolution (chap. 4). In each case, Thorsen and Wilkens seek to identify core theological principles that transcend the diversity of evangelical positions on these issues.

By placing the “inerrancy versus infallibility” debate within its historical context (chap. 5), the authors helpfully illustrate the diversity of understanding among evangelicals on the issues of biblical inspiration and authority. Appropriately, the role of the Wesleyan quadrilateral is recommended as not only a proper theological method to be employed in the process of interpretation, but as a balanced approach to understanding the primacy of Scripture in relation to tradition, reason, and experience, especially in light of the challenges of both the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and the rise of postmodernism.

Chapter 6 dismisses the myth that would identify all evangelicals as “rich Americans,” by pointing out the expansion and revitalization of evangelical Christianity in the Two-Thirds World. Thorsen and Wilkens expose the fallacy of limiting our range of vision to the western world when assessing the vitality of the movement. By broadening our understanding of evangelicalism, not only do the authors dispel the myth of the demise of the movement, but also point out the lessons that the church at large might learned from “Majority World” evangelicals.

The diversity of soteriological positions within evangelicalism is the subject of the seventh chapter, with its assessment of the relationship of the movement to Calvinism. To their credit, these Wesleyan authors give an appreciative nod to the theological contributions of John Calvin, although providing alternative evangelical perspectives (primarily Arminian) to the Calvinist doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation. A helpful discussion of the relationship of divine sovereignty and human freedom ensues, and differences of emphasis are shown to be representative of influential evangelicals in church history (i.e., Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley).

The political involvement of evangelicals is the focus of chapter eight. Thorsen and Wilkens seek to dispel the myth that all evangelicals

are Republicans. They attempt to broaden the reader's vision regarding the diversity of political affiliations within the movement, not only in relation to the American political scene, but also to international politics. The danger of evangelicalism being co-opted by political agendas is duly noted, and theological principles are provided for American Christian involvement in politics.

The final caricature dealt with in the book is with regard to evangelicalism as racist, sexist, and homophobic (chap. 9). Again, while acknowledging that some self-identified evangelicals have exhibited these tendencies, the authors show that the perception that all evangelicals have these same forms of prejudice has no foundation. The authors are sensitive to the fact, however, that evangelicals have a responsibility to overcome such stereotypes by engagement in ministries of social justice and compassion.

In the conclusion, Thorsen and Wilkens provide some suggestions regarding a proper understanding of evangelicalism. They assess three "classical definitions" of evangelicalism: one from David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, another from the "Statement of Faith" of the National Association of Evangelicals, and finally one from Billy's Graham's introduction to *The Evangelicals: An Illustrated History* by John Allan. Although the first two definitions receive support for their doctrinal affirmations, Thorsen and Wilkens take their lead from Graham's definition, with its emphasis on a "common commitment to evangelism" (196). In the end, they settle on a simple missiological understanding of the movement, defining evangelical Christians as the "people of the Great Commission . . . of the *missio Dei*." To "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) is thus "the basic impulse of evangelicalism" (198).

This book takes a "Socratic" approach to the beliefs, values, and practices that have been identified with evangelicalism, focusing on a critique of inadequate definitions of the movement. The authors' intent in "eliminating caricatures" (191) is to distil the essence of evangelical Christianity while maintaining a balanced emphasis on orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy (201). Although some may not agree with its assessment at every point, all will benefit from this winsome account of "evangelicalism's history, its present composition, and its trajectories" (12). The work is well written, with endnotes, and a select bibliography (but, unfortunately, no index).

Hart, David Bentley. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2009. xiv + 253 pages. ISBN 0300164297.

Reviewed by Nathan J. Willowby, Ph.D. student in Systematic Theology and Ethics, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

David Bentley Hart attacks those he calls the “New Atheists” in this attempt to re-narrate the role of Christianity in Western culture. Some of those who sit in pews and classrooms of churches and colleges within the Wesleyan tradition will read or hear the message against Christianity by twenty-first century atheism. The post-Christendom environment in which Wesleyans teach and preach is fertile for such atheist and secularist arguments to which Hart responds in this book.

Wesleyans may wish to suggest that our tradition has resources that help us avoid the pitfalls of modernity and the flawed premises on which the New Atheists base their secular understanding of ethics and reality. We may even think that, as Wesleyans, the contemporary atheism debate does not concern us. However, it is naïve to conclude that only fundamentalism and Roman Catholicism are under attack. We are included among the opponents of books like *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins (not to mention the \$20,000 billboard outside the Lincoln tunnel that the American Atheists rented inviting passers-by to “celebrate reason” during the Christmas season). More specifically, the purveyors of the narrative that Hart seeks to dispel would certainly reject Wesley’s balance of reason with tradition, Scripture, and experience.

One response to these New Atheists could be to echo Barth’s response to Brunner regarding natural theology: “No.” Hart takes neither that path nor the one of trying to shine light on the most nuanced theological answers that have been ignored. Instead, he offers “an extended meditation upon certain facts of history” (xiii). Put differently, he seeks to narrate history in a way that undermines the truncated and mistaken understanding of how we, in the West, arrived at our present situation.

Hart states that which he rejects as “the modern age’s grand narrative of itself: its story of the triumph of critical reason over ‘irrational’ faith, of the progress of social morality toward greater justice and freedom, of the ‘tolerance’ of the secular state, and of the unquestioned ethical primacy of either individualism or collectivism” (xi). Hart’s true target is not atheism as much as secularism (which he identifies as the true successor to Chris-

tendom) and misconceptions regarding the particular role of Christianity on modernity's moral universe. Briefly stated, Hart approaches his rejection in four ways: identifying the presuppositions of anti-religious secularists/atheists, identifying what modernity says about the Christian past of the West, countering modernity's view of Christianity in the West, and presenting the consequences of the decline of Christendom and a fully post-Christian morality.

Avoiding the temptation to offer a better and more nuanced understanding of God, instead Hart opts to illustrate the central necessity of God and a particularly Christian imagination for the possibility of secularism and their arguments. In other words, he refuses the ground on which secularism wants all discussion to take place. His description of the development of modern thought claims that even the norms by which secularism criticizes religion are based on Christian moral values. Hart is clearly working with a different understanding of reality than the pure materialism of many New Atheists. Part of the strength of this book is his identification of this difference and response to the historical forgetfulness present in modern secularism's view of itself.

Hart reconsiders Western history and points to the various ways that modernity has misrepresented its own development and the role of Christianity from antiquity to the late medieval era. He corrects the "popular" understanding of several key issues: the Church's relationship vis-à-vis medieval and renaissance science, "Wars of Religion," the Spanish Inquisition, Hellenism's scientific commitments, the "Dark Ages," and views of women. However, Hart goes beyond a mere re-description of history; he also offers a strong exposition of the centrality of unquestioned free choice as the highest good that undergirds secularism and puts it in opposition to any claim on the will such as Christian doctrines of charity, chastity, and faithfulness. In this, Nietzsche is lauded as a much better critique of Christianity than contemporary anti-religious secularists for his understanding of the problem of the will.

Another strength is the presence of real concessions of the Church's failures. They are not merely rhetorical, "yeah, but" concessions, but honest admissions of places where humans and institutions failed to follow the radical Christian revolution that had taken claim over Western Europe's imagination. The final strength I want to consider here is the accessibility of his argument. While theological and philosophical language is present, Hart does not go into deeply obscured metaphysical and

doctrinal excursions (e.g., compare the level of scientific theory required to understand Richard Dawkins).

Hart chose to use as few notes as possible, but this is unfortunate. When confronting popular or mistaken historical memory, it would strengthen his argument if his sources were more clearly documented (and accessible in footnotes instead of endnotes). Those inclined to agree with his arguments (or trained in church or Western history) may not find this problematic, but for a reader inclined towards the arguments of the New Atheists, regular citations would undoubtedly increase the credibility of Hart's argument. A second weakness comes in Hart's writing style. He makes a strong case that compassion, love of neighbor, and unassailable human worth entered Western consciousness through Christianity, yet he chooses violence in his language toward the writers with whom he is arguing. When lauding the advent of true charity, it would be wise to convey charity in one's treatment of opponents.

This book is an excellent explication of the flaws in recent anti-religious arguments and the trend within Western culture to worship tolerance of most everything except decisions based on faith. Readers seeking to understand the assumptions of secularity and how Christianity both created the possibility of these positions and yet calls them into question will find this book enlightening and helpful. It functions as both an apologetic and a pointed critique. In fact, Hart closes with a scary chapter on where secularity may eventually lead if the moral imagination of Christianity is fully eclipsed.

Hart casts light on both the presuppositions and logical implications of the vision of the human, world, and ethics that is preferred by the New Atheists. In many ways, Hart has laid the narrative ground on which Christians can, in Wesleyan fashion, apply the theological tools at our disposal (including but not limited to reason), in an attempt to allow the "Christian interruption" to continue "shaping the reality all of us inhabit" (xiii). While acknowledging reality of consequences from the decline of Christendom, Hart points to the possibility of a new Christendom in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Perhaps he is right. The real strength of this book, however, is not in its hope of a new Christendom, but rather in correcting the mistaken perception of how the West arrived at its current state and illustrating that the real task for Christians is "to continue the mission of their ancient revolution" (241).

Hart has unmasked the weak foundation on which the New Atheists have built their critique of religion and Christianity in particular. He accomplishes his task of unmasking the weaknesses in his opponents and has provided a valuable resource and contribution to the field of apologetics that is historically grounded. I recommend this book for undergraduate or seminary courses that deal with atheism and those in local churches who either want a solid background to understand the questions that may arise from a fellow congregant who is wrestling with questions of atheism and secularism or those needing the answers.

Mann, Mark H. *Perfecting Grace: Holiness, Human Being and the Sciences*. New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2006. x + 196 pp. ISBN 0567025531.

Reviewed by Amos Yong, J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, VA.

Mark Mann's *Perfecting Grace* does for Wesleyan scholarship what Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's *A Theology of Love* (Beacon Hill, 1970) did for Wesleyan pastors and church leaders and what Michael Lodahl and Thomas Jay Oord's *Relational Holiness* (Beacon Hill, 2004) did for Wesleyan laypeople: present a winsome case for a considered rethinking of the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness within a relational framework for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century context. As a piece of scholarship intended for the broader theological academy, however, Mann's book also advances the discussion in two significant ways. On the one hand, he reconstructs the theology of holiness in dialogue with the anthropological sciences (i.e., the cognitive, sociological, and psychological sciences). On the other hand, he presents a very convincing theological anthropology to the wider academy. The latter is surely informed by Wesleyan perspectives and commitments, but is no less plausible as a model for doing theological anthropology across the ecumenical spectrum of the church catholic in the present time.

What do the sciences contribute to Mann's formulation? Cognitive scientists like Antonio Damasio, Andrew Newberg, and others help us understand the neurophysiological basis of the mythic and ritual aspects of our religious life. Sociologists like Peter Berger in turn illuminate the socio-historical and linguistic character of our religious projections, even as the latter can also be, for theists, reflections of our beings as image bearers of God. Last, but not least, psychologists like Erik Erickson open up the developmental shape of human nature as well as the dynamic shape of religious and ritual across the life cycle. What emerges is a theological anthropology that is complex (rather than unambiguous about the nature of religious life or holiness), multidimensional (rather than dualistically framed), social (rather than individualistically attuned), dynamic (rather than statically divided into two or three basic religious states), and yet involving freedom and responsibility (rather than being deterministic either scientifically or theologically).

What Mann also carefully elucidates is how this vision of the human—sketched in three middle chapters across the book and summarized in a fourth—is bookended by insightful analyses of holiness theol-

ogy. Thus, the scientific findings are set against the backdrop of and therefore enable comparisons and contrasts with the theological anthropologies of major Wesleyan theologians, beginning with Wesley's dispositional and affective views (although Wesley was more a pastor than he was a systematician about his ideas), Phoebe Palmer's rationalistic doctrine of assurance (wherein conviction about sanctification is received by faith), Daniel Steele's eradicationism (and its concomitant denial of gradualism in the experience of holiness), and Wynkoop's relational model (to which this book provides scientific scaffolding for a deeper appreciation for her achievements). In turn, the final two chapters show how holiness doctrines like original sin and the fall can be retrieved (not as biogenetic mediated but as part of the socio-historical matrix of human formation), how the Christian symbols of perfection can be understood (as appropriate to the developmental and contextual nature of human life), how sanctification and its means might still be effective in the contemporary world (through a range of means of grace capable of engaging people with different histories and in different contexts), and how assurance and the means of discernment amid the ambiguities of life might yet be accomplished. This synthesis is valuable not just for Wesleyans looking to preserve or expand on their understandings of holiness but for all who believe that holiness remains essential to Christian faith.

It is astonishing to realize that a work of such careful scholarship, interdisciplinary breadth, and theological maturity is only Mann's first book, a revision of his Boston University doctoral dissertation. Those looking to nit-pick will have to fall back on the expected criticisms that not enough science has been factored in or that important ideas of other holiness theologians ought to have been more substantively engaged than they have been. But to do so would miss what is accomplished in this brilliant reconstruction by Mann, currently the director of the Wesleyan Center, Point Loma Press, and Honors Program at Point Loma University: that no matter which scientific theories or theological proposals are consulted, the end result will only complement and enlarge the vision for holiness presented in the pages of this volume. Wesleyans in particular, but all who do not want to give up on a theology of holiness in general, are indebted to Mann for providing such a comprehensive, vigorous, and intelligent re-articulation of this important doctrine. Just as importantly, though, those of us yearning for holiness will find in this book just the encouragement—perhaps even a means of the Spirit's sanctifying grace—to press on toward perfection in the holy love of God.



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