

Click on the bookmarks icon to the left of the  
PDF Reader for quick links to each article.

# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

*Publication of the*  
Wesleyan Theological Society

<b>RECONCILIATION: THE BIBLICAL IMPERATIVE AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
James Earl Massey	
<b>RECONCILIATION AND RESISTANCE: A CASE STUDY .....</b>	<b>25</b>
E. Glenn Hinson	
<b>THE HERESIES OF LOVE     The WTS Presidential Address</b>	
K. Steve McCormick.....	<b>35</b>
<b>RECONCILING CLASHING ECUMENICAL VISIONS: THE CHURCH OF GOD (ANDERSON) AND THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Barry L. Callen	
<b>A WESLEYAN MODEL FOR RECONCILIATION AND EVANGELISM? HEGEL AND LÉVINAS .....</b>	<b>70</b>
Christina M. Gschwandtner	
<b>EARLY METHODISM: A PARADIGM FOR NON-VIOLENCE.....</b>	<b>86</b>
David L. Cubie	
<b>SPEAKING GRACEFULLY: THE DYNAMIC OF LANGUAGE IN THE ECONOMY OF RECONCILIATION .....</b>	<b>106</b>
Nathan R. Kerr	
<b>DISFIGURING HARMONY: RECONCILIATION, MARK C. TAYLOR, AND POSTMODERN THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS ...</b>	<b>131</b>
Kenton M. Stiles	
<b>WHY IS EVANGELISM IMPORTANT IF ONE CAN BE SAVED WITHOUT THE GOSPEL? .....</b>	<b>158</b>
Eric Manchester	
<b>BETWEEN RHETORIC AND PRACTICE: IN PURSUIT OF THE RECONCILED COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT .....</b>	<b>171</b>
James W. Lewis	
<b>ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND: MEMORY AS KENOSIS IN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT .....</b>	<b>195</b>
Christopher P. Momany	
<b>BOOK REVIEWS .....</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>ADVERTISING .....</b>	<b>233</b>

Volume 37, Number 1  
Spring, 2002

The Journal  
of the  
**WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
A Fellowship of Wesleyan-Holiness Scholars

Digitized text copyright 2008 by  
the Wesley Center Online.

Editor and Chair of the Editorial Committee:  
Barry L. Callen, 1993 to present

All communications concerning editorial matters should be addressed to the Editor, Barry L. Callen, c/o Anderson University, 1100 East 5th Street, Anderson, Indiana 46012. Communication about book reviews is to be directed to the Book Review Editor, David Bundy, c/o Christian Theological Seminary, 1000 West 42nd Street, P.O. Box 8867, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. Membership dues and other financial matters should be addressed to the Secretary-Treasurer, William Kostlevy, c/o Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky 40390. Rate and application form are found at the end of this issue. E-mail addresses for all officers of the Society are also found on the inside of the back cover.

Publication Address: Wesleyan Theological Society, P. O. Box 144, Wilmore, Kentucky 40390.

Society Web Address: [www.holiness.org/WTS](http://www.holiness.org/WTS)

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
(Organized 1965)

The Society's mission is to encourage the exchange of ideas among Wesleyan-Holiness theologians; to develop a source of papers for CHP (Christian Holiness Partnership) seminars; to stimulate scholarship among younger theologians and pastors; and to publish a scholarly journal.

# **WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**



Published by the Wesleyan Theological Society  
P. O. Box 144  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

© Copyright 2002 by the  
Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com), or visit <http://www.atla.com/>. Available on-line through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Series), Latham, New York, and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.

Available in Microform from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Dept. I.R., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Other than the most recent issues, the journal is available electronically at this online address: <http://wesley.nnc.edu>

WTS on the Web: [www.holiness.org/WTS.htm](http://www.holiness.org/WTS.htm)

Views expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Wesleyan Theological Society, the Editor, or the Editorial Committee.

Printed by  
Old Paths Tract Society  
Shoals, Indiana 47581

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

### ARTICLE WRITERS:

<b>Barry L. Callen</b>	<b>Anderson University</b>
<b>David L. Cubie</b>	<b>Mount Vernon Nazarene College</b>
<b>Christina Gschwandtner</b>	<b>DePaul University</b> <b>(doctoral candidate)</b>
<b>E. Glenn Hinson</b>	<b>Chandler School of Theology</b> <b>(visiting prof.)</b>
<b>Nathan R. Kerr</b>	<b>Southern Baptist Theo. Seminary</b> <b>(doctoral candidate)</b>
<b>James W. Lewis</b>	<b>Anderson University</b>
<b>K. Steve McCormick</b>	<b>Eastern Nazarene College</b>
<b>Eric Manchester</b>	<b>Viterbo University</b>
<b>James Earl Massey</b>	<b>Anderson and Tuskegee Universities</b> <b>(retired)</b>
<b>Christopher P. Momany</b>	<b>Adrian College</b>
<b>Kenton M. Stiles</b>	<b>Graduate Theo. Union, Berkeley</b> <b>(doctoral candidate)</b>

### BOOK REVIEWERS:

**David Bundy, Barry L. Callen, William C. Kostlevy,  
Thomas J. Oord, Thomas E. Phillips,  
Henry W. Spaulding II, and Graham Walker.**



## EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue draws upon the significant materials presented at the 36th annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society that convened on the campus of Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana, on March 2-3, 2001. Under the able leadership of Sharon Clark Pearson, the program theme was "The Dynamics of Power in the Service of Reconciliation."

Among the pieces included here are the presentations at this meeting by the two keynoters, James Earl Massey and E. Glenn Hinson, and the presidential address by K. Steve McCormick. The theme of reconciliation is explored biblically, historically, linguistically, aesthetically, and in relation to evangelism, ecumenism, racism, and pacifism. Several significant book reviews also appear.

One book should be noted in particular. At the 2002 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, convened on the campus of Hobe Sound Bible College in Florida, the Smith/Wynkoop Book Award of the Society was given to Dr. Diane Leclerc for her exceptional book titled *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective* (The Scarecrow Press, 2001). This work is commended for your attention. Also note the new autobiography of Dr. James Earl Massey, recognized by the WTS in 1995 with its "Lifetime Achievement Award." See the advertisements for each in this issue.

Should you wish to communicate with the officers of the Society, their names, roles, and e-mail addresses appear at the end of this Journal. For matters of membership, dues, address changes, and obtaining back issues of the Journal, contact the Secretary/Treasurer. Submissions for possible publication in a future issue of the Journal should be directed to the Editor.

A word is in order in relation to the phrase "Wesleyan-holiness-feminist-hermeneutic" that appears in the article by Diane Leclerc in the Fall 2001 issue (105). The same wording is employed by Susie Cunningham Stanley in her 1993 work *Feminist Pillar of Fire: The Life of Alma White*.

In our troubled world, the power of the Spirit and the example of a reconciled and reconciling Christian community are needed urgently. May these pages serve that end in some meaningful manner.

Barry L. Callen, Editor  
Anderson University  
Spring 2002





# RECONCILIATION: THE BIBLICAL IMPERATIVE AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS<sup>1</sup>

by

James Earl Massey

The topic of reconciliation is strategic and timely because everywhere one looks, whether at life within America or at life across our world, conflicts between persons and groups are playing themselves out, with publicized, prolonged, and uncivil struggling over differences—differences in values and ethics, differences in religious views, differences over land claims, territorial rights, political ends, and a host of other fractious debates. All of them are deepened by the drama of power and its abuse. Conflict holds center stage in our time and in all places, and voices of wisdom addressed to those involved in the fray—or the number of persons of good will to help quell the conflicts—are all too few. I applaud and join the Wesleyan Theological Society in its concern to become more effective agents of our Lord as we face the issues and handle the living of these days as God’s people.

Addressing this august assemblage is both a joy and a challenge: a joy because as “people of the Book” we have a deep respect for what the Christian Scriptures have to say on the subject of reconciliation, as well as on all other subjects; while the challenge includes us all because of the task that awaits us along the path we must take, a path that stretches out into

---

<sup>1</sup>This article was the keynote presentation at the 2001 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society. Portions were previously published in substantially the same form as a chapter in Timothy George and Robert Smith, Jr., eds., *A Mighty Long Journey* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 199-222. Used here by permission.

territory fraught with the conflicts that occur when people meet. These conflicts we are called and sent to address in the name and power of the One who is our peace. In preparing for this keynote address, I took comfort in the fact that I would be among treasured friends and esteemed colleagues, all of you persons who, because of your training as well as your work, form what James Barr has referred to as “an instructed theological public.”<sup>2</sup>

### **I. Reconciliation: The New Testament Teachings**

As we begin, I invite you to join me in re-exploring the four major biblical terms regarding reconciliation, giving due attention to the contexts within which these terms were used and the meanings and guidance to which we are heirs because of these terms.

**Term One: *Diallasso*.** The first reconciliation passage to which I call attention is found among the ethical instructions from our Lord, and it is located in Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21-26. It is the section that contains the first of those six bold antithetic imperatives from our Lord that reflect his authority as not only Moses’ successor but Moses’ superior. These six antitheses carry us to the very center of what constitutes a truly righteous heart response in human experience; they tell us how the new life under the lordship of Christ surpasses life under the old laws of Moses, which explains the construction that is found in these teachings: “You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.”

This section from Matthew 5 deals with anger, that strong human feeling of displeasure that at a belligerently wrathful stage can result in murder. Jesus here instructs his followers on how to handle anger before that stage of belligerency is reached. He also tells how anger can block a relationship with God. Note that the speaking of rash, insulting words to others, all selfish speaking out of intense feelings that are full of human wrath, even if these feelings have been provoked by someone’s prior selfish action, is viewed by Jesus as not only a selfish response to the offending person but as a sinful deed in God’s sight as well. Hostility is an activ-

---

<sup>2</sup>James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press, 1961), vii.

ity of the heart, and those who wish to be accepted in peace by God must be serious about remaining at peace with humans.

True worship is blocked whenever and as long as hostility rages within the heart against another human. As vs. 23-24 state, reconciliation between the aggrieved parties must take place before God will accept our worship. The instruction is “be reconciled,” meaning that the one who seeks to please God must take the initiative to remove whatever blocks a right relation with the other person. The verb used here is *diallagethi* [aorist imperative passive of *diallasso*], a word that appears only here in the New Testament. It is one of four terms used by the New Testament to teach the need to restore or bring back into agreement or harmony a relation that has been broken or at least is at odds.

**Term Two: *Sunlasso*.** The second passage I call to your attention is found in Acts 7. The entire chapter reports Stephen the Deacon’s defensive speech to the Sanhedrin as its members sat in council against him and he witnessed about Jesus. As he engaged in historical retrospect, seeking to show that the history of the Hebrew people pointed to the very happenings to which he was giving witness, Stephen recalled the life and times of Moses, the nation’s great lawgiver, and how Moses had been readied for his role by growing up as a prince in Egypt, the place of the first and longest confinement of the Jews. Then comes that section in the narrative which includes verse 7:26: “The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile [*sunellassen*] them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?’ ” It is not necessary to say anything more about that passage except to point out that the word used in vs. 26 for “reconcile” is *sunlasso*, a second term used in the New Testament. The imperfect form of the verb, *sunellassen*, is used here in the report to indicate that Moses “tried to reconcile” the two recalcitrant brawling Hebrews.

**Term Three: *Katallasso*.** A third passage that mentions reconciliation, using *katallasso*, a third term, is found in 1 Corinthians 7, and the passage is part of some instruction from Paul about the need to restore a lost or problem-threatened spousal relationship. Interestingly, this instruction will show an immediate dependence by Paul upon the sayings of Jesus about marriage. The ethics Paul taught actually reflects exact parallels at many points with the teachings of Jesus, and even when no parallel is evi-

dent his judgments and recommendations to believers are understandably at one with the spirit of those teachings.

In the instruction Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, it is quite clear that he has appropriated a known teaching of the Lord and passes it on in the interest of restoring a broken or fragmenting marriage relationship. It is possible that Paul appealed here to some fixed written record that he possessed, some form of sayings-collection that had been gathered because of controversies, questions about moral matters, and the meaning of certain passages from the Hebrew Bible (in its Septuagint translation) that were important for instructing the believers. While that is possible and would explain so much, I cannot state that it was indeed the case, but the very fact that he could write “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord” shows a strict knowledge about the Lord’s words on the matter of spousal relations. Thus, Paul was not inventing new directions when he counseled: “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate [*me choristhenai*] from her husband, but if she does separate [*choristhe*], let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled [*katallageto*] to her husband, and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (7:10-11).

Paul here addresses a Christian couple whose married life has for some reason become problematic and irksome or broken. His charge to them is based on the Lord’s own teaching on the matter: do not divorce one another. The traditional teaching as reported in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 and in Mark 10:11 is reflected here. The family should remain in solidarity; if the wife insists upon leaving the marriage, she must remain single [*meno-to agamos*], and the husband must not marry someone else during the separation. This command of Jesus that Paul quotes and applies regards the bond that marriage involves, and he reminds the couple that reconciliation should be their proper concern if that bond is placed under severe strain and they separate.

*Katallasso*, the word Paul used here, is the most regularly used word in the New Testament for reconciliation, and its basic meaning is “to change, or exchange; to effect a change.” This word is used exclusively by Paul among the New Testament writers, and always to help express and explain to his readers some of the meaning and effects of Christ’s deed of dying for us on a cross. In the uses of this term on Paul’s part, we are being

instructed about the Atonement, which in the words of Vincent Taylor, is “the work of God in Christ for man’s salvation and renewal.”<sup>3</sup>

The word *katallasso* denotes a relation, a relation that has undergone a change for the better. It is one word among many in a family of images that set forth to us the meaning of a changed relation. The changed relation is made possible by someone acting toward someone else with concern to effect that change. The image in the word shows something having been set aside [**kata**]: an attitude, a grievance, a position, a deed, a distance, a result, in order to induce or bring about a change for the better. A new disposition is exhibited, a new stance is assumed, a new framework is established granting a rich togetherness where enmity and distance previously were the order. Paul used the noun “reconciliation” [*katallage*] to report something proffered to us by God (Romans 5:8-11) and something experienced by us on the basis of the sacrificial death Jesus Christ underwent on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:17ff).

**Term Four: *Apokattallasso*.** The fourth term used in the New Testament for reconciliation is the word *apokattallasso*, found at Eph. 2:16 and Col. 1:20, 22. It also is a part of Paul’s same theological message about the meaning and effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus for those who believe on him. I will return to this word and the cited verses in which it appears, but first I want to examine 2 Corinthians 5 where one finds that classic passage regarding reconciliation.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Paul makes a personal statement and an advisory claim. Having entered upon a new life-course through his converting contact with the Risen Christ, and having undergone a full change of world-view thereby, Paul here states his reasons for the ministry at which he has long been engaged now: (a) He is part of a “new creation” inaugurated by being “in Christ” (=inhabiting a new sphere of reality); and (b) He has received a commission to announce to all people the reconciling action of God in Christ by which that newness became possible.

---

<sup>3</sup>Vincent Taylor, *The Cross of Christ* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1957), 87. For some additional treatments of reconciliation as related to the church’s teaching on atonement, see also Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1960), esp. 70-108; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956); Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul’s Theology* (London: Marshall, 1981).

It is helpful to point out that this statement on Paul's part is in defense of his ministry that had been the subject under attack by some of his critics (see 2:14-7:4). The attitude of those critics toward him was not just suspicious but hostile and defiant (see 2:5-11; 7:12). Paul was no longer the Moses-follower (3:1-18), like his critics, but a Christ-follower; Paul knew that the promised New Age had already dawned, and he knew himself called by God to announce that fact and expound upon its results and effects for all who believe.

Paul wrote as he did because he was concerned about two things: to keep trusting believers rightly informed about his ministry; and to become reconciled with those who were his detractors. Paul wanted his critics to be compatriots in Christ, to be in right relation with him again. As he sought to inform, influence, and win them, he became poetic, and his lyrical bent comes through in the hymnic statement we find in this great passage. Viewing the whole of life and humanity now through eyes touched by the Risen Christ, Paul wanted his readers to be fully oriented to a new way of viewing him and all others as well. As he states it:

5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled [*katallazontos*] us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation [*katallage*];

5:19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling [*katallasson*] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation [*katallages*] to us.

5:20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled [*katallagete*] to God.

Paul explains that God is the reconciler, God took the initiative, while the world, i.e., humankind, is the object of God's reconciling action. Christ is God's agent of reconciliation, and through Christ alone was that reconciliation made possible. ". . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself," Paul declares, and he urged his believing readers to join him in being reconciled in full: "be reconciled [*katallagete*, aorist imperative pas-

sive] to God.” What God initiated through grace and has proffered in love we can experience through an accepting faith and continuing obedience. Romans 5:10-11 repeats the statement about what has been proffered and experienced:

5:10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled [*katellagemen*, aorist passive ] to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled [*katallagentes*, aorist participle passive], will we be saved by his life.

5:11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation [*katallage*].

Let us turn back now to the two passages I mentioned, Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:20 and 22. In Eph. 2:16 we see Paul’s discussion of reconciliation as it relates to the removal of the previous division that existed between Jews and Gentiles, a division based upon not just one but several separating factors: religious differences, legal differences, cultural differences, racial and social differences. In a bold and declarative announcement, Paul states that God’s reconciling deed in Christ has changed that division altogether and has made the two groups one in his sight: “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile [*apokatallaze*, aorist subjunctive] both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it” (2:15-16).

Then follows that grand teaching about the believing Gentiles’ privileged participation, on equal footing, with believing Jews in God’s “household,” the church. Here we see a wider communal interest to God’s reconciling deed in Christ, a wider social application of the effects of reconciliation. The God-ordained relationship between Christian believers, of whatever previous backgrounds, is not just one of harmony but a oneness where neither group is dominant nor subservient anymore. The fence that once stood between them is now down. Because believers are reconciled to God, they are also related to each other. A new set of criteria obtains now for human relations in the church. In church life social distance must no longer be the order, and a sense of oneness and equality must prevail when previously-honored differences seek to intrude themselves.

The last reference text is Col. 1:20, 22, where that fourth term for reconciliation, *apokatallasso*, is used again. Let us read it in context:

1:19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,  
 1:20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile [*apokatalazai*, aorist infinitive] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

1:21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

1:22 he has now reconciled [*apokatellazen*, aorist] in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—

1:23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard. . . .

The universal and cosmic significance of God's work through Christ is in view where the passage speaks about "all things" being reconciled, "whether on earth or in heaven." Reconciliation, then, will finally involve the universe as a whole and not just believing humans; the time will come when the universe will no longer be subjected to decay or dissolution but will reflect the harmony that God originally intended for all that was created.

The actual work of reconciling requires a distinct focus and distinctive frame of reference: it requires a focus on the other person as someone of value, whatever the facts that make that person different or difficult or distant, and it requires an attitude of forgiveness and inclusiveness that can claim or reclaim that person for relation and closeness. The attitude of forgiveness motivates one to set aside that which causes distance, and the spirit of inclusiveness exhibits openness by which togetherness can begin and achieve development. According to several of the texts we have examined, in Christ God has acted kindly toward us in this way, proffering forgiveness for sins, restored harmony after a life of disobedience, and peaceful relations after our selfish waywardness that displeased God. Christ acted on our behalf as God's reconciling agent. Paul explains that, having received reconciliation, he had been given a ministry as a reconciler. This means that he had to learn to see other people as God sees them, he had to be open to relate to people with a view to their God-given worth, their human potential, and their deepest human need.



This framework and focus is the basis for evangelism in depth and human community in full. As Howard Thurman once voiced it, “One person, standing in his [or her] own place, penetrates deeply into the life of another in a manner that makes possible an ingathering within that other life, and thus the wildness is gentled out of a personality at war with itself.”<sup>4</sup> We too can develop this ability, this way of relating to another, provided there is, first, a deep gratitude to God for having reconciled us, and second, an intentional concern to be a reconciling person. God has been open to us. We can learn to be open to others. It begins with a simple interest in learning to be open, with a concern for people’s deepest need, and it deepens through a continuing gratitude to God for accepting us as He has so graciously done. This is how, like Paul, we become “ambassadors for Christ,” and work among people with “God making his appeal through us.” Paul must have been seeking to underscore the importance of this when, in concluding that classic passage in 2 Corinthians about reconciliation, he quickly and rightly advised his readers, “we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1).

## II. Reconciliation: Aspects of Our Task

Our re-examination of the biblical statements about reconciliation has highlighted four Greek terms and has yielded at least three results: (1) It has reminded us about what reconciliation means in the vocabulary of faith; (2) It has refreshed our understanding about God’s reconciling work through Christ Jesus, thus deepening our gratitude for received grace, which in turn can stir us to worship God more attentively; and (3) It has brought into sharper focus our task as reconciling agents, a task which in the press of our times calls for greater attention and more strategic action on our part.

The first and second of these results from our study are in the vertical category of our Christian experience since God and the self are related by a personal faith. The third result involves the horizontal dimension of our Christian experience since it requires interacting with other humans. The longer we consider this, the greater the awareness becomes that personal faith in Christ—the vertical dimension—and the obedient outworking of that faith in dealing with others—the horizontal dimension—*always*

---

<sup>4</sup>Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 108.

*form a cross.* This must be remembered as we go about our work in the world because reconciliation is always a costly matter. It was by cost to Jesus Christ that we were reconciled to God, and we cannot be reconciling agents in his name without undergoing some demands that will press upon us.

Before I extend this line of thought, here is a short list of some books which treat the theological aspects of reconciliation in greater detail than I can do here, and with it a still shorter list of two books which can give further guidance regarding the social aspects of reconciliation. As for the theology of reconciliation, the following four books can both widen one's perspective and also deepen one's devotion:

Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956);

Vincent Taylor, *The Cross of Christ: Eight Public Lectures* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1957);

Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1960);

Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London: Marshall, 1981).

These are but four books selected from among many other studies which treat the theology of reconciliation, but I believe you will find these four both readily available, intellectually arresting, and theologically astute.

For insights on the social outworking of the reconciliation concern, these two books, despite the many others now available, are the two that I rate at the top of the list:

Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963);

Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge—Our Only Hope* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997).

Howard Thurman (1899-1981), an African-American, was a noted minister, educator, and author who in his preaching, teaching and writings delineated, in my judgment, the most thoroughly analytical, scholarly, and practical account of how the Christian faith can inform the American democratic tradition for its fullest development. His insights were addressed to

healing the deep-seated social ills of this nation, and the final chapter in his book on *Disciplines of the Spirit* offers his counsel, derived from a fresh examination of the Christian faith allied with proofs from his own experiences, about how to become and develop as a reconciling person. Thurman delineated with clarity how and why it is that “the discipline of reconciliation for the religious [person] cannot be separated from the discipline of religious experience”<sup>5</sup> itself. Influenced by the account we have examined in Matthew 5:24, Thurman explained that: “What a man knows as his birthright in his experience before God he must accept and affirm as his necessity in his relations with his fellows.” He further explained: “This is why the way of reconciliation and the way of love finally are one way.”<sup>6</sup> Thurman’s discussion about the discipline that *agape*-love provides in the life of someone who *wills* and *works* for reconciliation is the best that I have ever read.

Curtiss Paul DeYoung, author of *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge—Our Only Hope*, is Caucasian, a former student of mine, and presently serves as president of TURN Leadership Foundation, a metro-wide ministry network based in Minneapolis that serves as a catalyst for reconciliation and social justice in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. DeYoung is one of those voices of goodwill speaking out to offer guidance and give help to persons and cities experiencing social conflict. His book is his attempt to share wisdom, a wisdom that is biblical and tested in his own life struggles. This book is a logical and planned sequel to his earlier book entitled *Coming Together: The Bible’s Message in an Age of Diversity*, which discussed the Bible as, in part, a record of a culturally diverse people seeking God’s will, and how the person Jesus, “an Afro-Asiatic Galilean Jew,” became a universal Christ who liberates, shapes a new and inclusive community, and empowers his followers to be agents of reconciliation. The book *Coming Together* ends with a call for reconciliation, and DeYoung’s treatment in the book *Reconciliation* offers counsel on the process one must understand and follow in developing a reconciliation mind-set, entering into meaningful relationships, and taking responsibility for the polarization that exists. There are places where DeYoung calls attention to how he came to experience what he has written about, and he has written about it all with a responsible and contagious bearing. His

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 122.

is a holistic approach, with an accent on the discipline and cost of being a reconciler. Knowing him as I do, and knowing some of the risks he has had to take and some of what he has had to undergo as a believing, teaching, active practitioner of *agape*-love, I strongly recommend DeYoung's books on reconciliation. Based in a vital Christian faith, they offer sound guidance, a guidance that is never past tense but contemporary, focused, creative, and practical.

I have called attention to Thurman's work and DeYoung's treatment of reconciliation because both deal necessarily, forthrightly, and helpfully with the discipline demanded for those who would work as agents of reconciliation. It is a discipline that demands realism in the face of divisive walls, hostility, and hate; a discipline that refuses to cower before the barriers that block harmony; a discipline that properly and steadily informs, encourages, and energizes one to engage in the divine process of reconciliation, that readies one to take responsibility, and, understanding the necessity for forgiveness, seeks to effect it by touching the soul, repairing the wrong that injured, and establishing the needed relationship. This discipline demands an active love, a healthy self-image, willingness to risk oneself, and a sense of being companioned in the task by God.

A word is in order about the part forgiveness plays in becoming reconciled, both the seeking of forgiveness and granting it. Forgiveness is that ability and active willingness to pardon someone and thus "wipe out," as it were, the reason for the discord and separation. Forgiveness demands the letting go of grudges and attitudes that block being related. Some months ago, while reading an issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 17, 1998, A18-A20), I was delightfully surprised to learn from one of its articles about some research currently underway in several universities dealing with "Forgiveness Studies." In view of marital discord, families in disarray, and nations wracked by ethnic, tribal and religious divisions, social psychologists have become increasingly concerned about the effects of anger, resentment, and the desire for revenge, among other attitudes and feelings, on mind-body connections, and how forgiveness can improve physical as well as mental health. At the time the article appeared there were twenty-nine projects underway in universities on forgiveness research, with the John Templeton Foundation having underwritten most of the support cost. The scholars are at work conducting studies, developing inventory checklists to assess whether and how persons learn to forgive and what they forgive. They have been busy administering tests, collecting

data, organizing conferences, bringing researchers into contact with each other, and publishing preliminary reports and articles about their still embryonic science. They are concerned to define the meaning and parameters of forgiveness, the need for forgiveness, as well as the effects of forgiveness. Although most people equate this subject with religion and not science, some of the scientists have shown concern about finding common ground between the two approaches to forgiveness. The current research is aimed at determining what forgiveness is, how it works, in which cases, and what its effects are at the level of mind-body connections.

From the standpoint of religious experience, we know that true forgiveness can and does happen in the human heart, and that emotional and behavioral changes take place in both the forgiving person and the person who is forgiven because of the creative and healing power of love. Those persons who are deeply aware that God loves and has forgiven them seem to deal with their hurt feelings more quickly and forgive more readily. We humans can be trained to forgive, and reconciling agents must help people learn and choose to do so. The bottom line is always that the wounded person must willingly turn away from the history of the happening, refuse to harbor resentment raised by the happening, and choose to forgive those responsible for wronging them. This is easier to achieve when the offending action is in the past and the offender or offenders have offered a sincere apology, but even when this has not happened a reasonably thinking person can be predisposed in spirit to forgive. A serious believer will surely be so predisposed, instructed by the example of Jesus as he hung on his cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a).

As church leaders, we will all readily agree that the church has a potential and mandated role to bring people together, to help people experience forgiveness, both the forgiveness God grants and the forgiveness needed from other people. We must remain mindful of our Lord’s encouraging pronouncement: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9). This beatitude is preserved only in Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount and seems addressed to those who have a heart for helping others to become reconciled. In the setting of that day, it could as well have been a word of caution to those in the listening crowd who were of a zealous bent, those listeners who were sympathetic to militaristic attempts to remove the yoke of Roman rule from the Jewish nation’s neck. Was this a warning word from Jesus that the only

holy crusades are crusades for peace? The political environment of our Lord's ministry should never be overlooked in studying what he taught and how he taught.<sup>7</sup> In this beatitude Jesus tells us all that God's kingdom is not promoted by human violence, that peacemaking is the way to shape the best future, and that those who do this work of effecting reconciliation are God's true children.

In light of this, it is important to reflect on how often this emphasis on being peaceful or on making peace appears in the New Testament. Interestingly, the exhortation "be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50b) is linked in that verse with the instruction of Jesus that we are to be like salt in the world. Here is the full saying: "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you restore its saltiness? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50). There are two passages in Romans with a similar emphasis: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18); and "Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19). In 2 Corinthians 13:11 we are told: "... agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you." First Thessalonians 5:13b exhorts us, "Be at peace among yourselves." Hebrews 12:14 offers the same directive, with a reminder about right living: "Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Then there is that illuminating statement in James 3:18, part of a set of pointed instructions to a group of believers fractured by religious, economic, and social differences: "And a harvest of righteousness [or: the fruit of justice] is sown in peace for those who make peace." The message in the image is that righteousness makes its presence known and felt through peace. This line in James 3:18 is like the teaching of Jesus in the seventh beatitude, and it simply reports that peacemaking is the highest activity and the greatest deed. The truly righteous person promotes peace.

We recall the well-publicized news received in June of 1995 after the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, at its annual meeting passed a resolution of repentance for the denomination's involvement in and support of slavery, one of the contributing causes for founding the Convention one hundred and fifty years earlier. A public apology was made to African Americans, whose ancestors

---

<sup>7</sup>On this, see especially Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949); Alan Richardson, *The Political Christ* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973).

suffered under that pernicious system. The Convention sought forgiveness for justifying the slavery system, for involvement in the segregating system that followed slavery, and for its part in the history that shaped the racist climate that still afflicts this nation. The concern was reconciliation, and forgiveness was being sought in order to experience this benefit and need.

There were critics who viewed the Convention resolution with suspicion, coming so late as it did in the group's history, but I viewed the apology as responsible and honest. It is never too late to right a wrong, however long-standing, and the delegates were attempting to do so. That resolution of apology would never have happened apart from an announced "change of heart." Over time, the Southern Baptist Convention was readied for reconciliation, and it took more than one influencing factor: it took the impact of a more enlightened public, the legal overthrow of segregation, and a heightened moral and social conscience, among other things, but I must also highlight the critical influence upon the Convention's members of a more informed and humane reading of the Scriptures and the steady ministry of the Spirit of God who works always to effect reconciliation.

Our Lord's mandate that we evangelize (Matthew 28:18-20) is at one with our assignment to be reconcilers (2 Cor. 5:19-20). Both service roles have been entrusted to us, and both are strategically related in two ways: first, the same message that brings salvation is the basis for reconciliation not only with God but with other persons; and second, the same *agape*-love that motivates us to evangelize also motivates us to be reconciling agents. These two ministries might well be described as two sides of one coin since they are so closely conjoined for believers.

The ministry of evangelizing and the ministry of reconciling both call for a knowledgeable, earnest, patient, persistent, and unselfish spirit of caring about people. The caring must be strong and steady because evil forces do not yield their control without a fight, and destructive hostilities and entrenched angers are never scared off by just a Christian presence, however right our cause. We must be armed with meanings that matter, use apt methods to share those meanings, and we must care deeply enough for people in order to deal effectively with the attitudes, feelings, and other fall-out from the deep consciousness people have of personal offenses suffered and the threats people fear because of color differences and cultural diversities. I say this because these problems continue to be more determinative when people meet each other than the more reasonable goal of finding a common ground for relating peacefully and fruitfully. Remembered

injuries and differences in color and culture continue to predispose people to negate, exclude, or fight rather than seek peace. Our mandate to evangelize and our mission to reconcile authorize and empower us to break through the walls that block people from the harmony we so sorely need in this world.

We have noted earlier that reconciliation cannot be achieved without an active willingness to seek forgiveness and to forgive. As reconcilers, we can help persons reach and act out that willingness. In addition, and in the interest of maintaining harmony, we must help persons recognize, admit, and overcome their prejudices and learn to discipline their preferences. I will spare you further talk about *prejudices*, about which we often hear, but something more must be said here about *preferences*, since these can also block right relations between people.

The dictionary defines a *preference* as “a greater liking; a first choice; a giving of priority or advantage to someone or something.” We all know what it means to put one thing ahead of something else, as when choosing a car, a certain kind and size of house, a college or university to attend, to name a few instances. We exercised a preference when dating, which led to courtship and marriage. Preferences are very personal matters, daily concerns in the business of living and relating. We know what it is to enjoy having and doing what we prefer, and we know what it is to endure not having our likes and chosen priorities fulfilled. Preferences are part of our personality system, and their roots extend deep into the soil that nurtured our personal growth. Preferences must be understood and valued for what they are and for what they enable us to be and do. But preferences must also be scrutinized because they bias us, they slant us within, so that our interests, concerns, attitudes, and judgments about things will lean in a certain direction. Preferences must be measured and tested by something higher than our “likes,” “dislikes,” and “personal priorities” lest we find ourselves living really by prejudices. Unexamined preferences can be socially problematic. They can influence us, unwittingly, to act unwisely in some matter, or to give priority to some concern that does not promote peace but discord. A preference must be honored when it is just and unselfish, but it should be changed when it makes one selfishly judgmental, racist, and socially prohibitive.

So much goes into the molding of our lives, and that molding produces consequences in us that we follow mostly without thinking—until we are stirred by something that forces us to think about those conse-



quences.<sup>8</sup> Growing up, as we did, in some specific national, ethnic, racial, cultural, geographical, and denominational settings, we all tend to honor and prefer these settings and we tend to judge all else and all others by what our settings mean to us. But the time comes when we are stirred by something to think more deeply about what conditioned us and we find it necessary to alter our view about some matter or resist some influence that conditioned us improperly against responding openly, peacefully, and helpfully in the places where we now find ourselves. The conditioning is there inside us, and it stays there, steadily influencing us, until we see it for what it is and deal with it and ourselves, affirming what we should and altering what we must. Reconciliation is achieved only when we are no longer limited to or bound by what conditioned us against relating to others. And the fruits of reconciliation can only grow when we are disciplined and kept under management by a strong ethic for staying in relation.

I have quoted much from Paul and with understood reasons. As I conclude, I want to do so by highlighting Paul's declaration about how he handled his prior conditioning as a Hebrew as he dealt with the wider world of differing groups in the Roman Empire. His is a declaration about the principle that disciplined his preferences and kept him open as a relational and reconciling person. The declaration is found in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

9:19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.

9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law.

9:21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) that I might win those outside the law.

9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

9:23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

---

<sup>8</sup>For more on this, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), esp. 42-68.

Such was Paul's approach to handling his preferences; he kept those preferences ordered and informed by the higher principle of the relational imperative of *agape*-love. This kind of caring-sharing love does not concern itself with social expediency but with spiritual necessity and the best human future. So, it was truly the case with Paul, as he confessed to his Corinthian readers:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us . . . (2 Cor. 5:16-20a).

May this be the case with us as well.

# RECONCILIATION AND RESISTANCE<sup>1</sup>

by

E. Glenn Hinson

Reconciliation is in the air at Emory University this year. I believe the presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu on campus the two preceding years supplied the helium for it. The Archbishop had just come from chairing the Amnesty Committee in South Africa that had tried to bind up some of the terrible wounds left by the era of apartheid.

The theme of reconciliation in an age of violence and conflict excites me, but the emphasis on it without some kind of counterweight also disturbs me. My concern for reconciliation goes very deep in my life, all the way back to my earliest years. You see, I was born into a family of conflict. My earliest memories of anything are of my mother and father fighting—literally, physically. There is nothing in the world I would have coveted more than to see my mother and father find a way to reconcile and be one and at peace. But that never happened. They separated when I was seven and divorced soon afterwards.

I have the feeling that reconciliation needs something to complement it in its implementation. Like “peace,” it may connote the way persons in power look at life. As one of my astute African-American friends once remarked, “peace” is a “white person’s issue,” “justice” is a “black person’s issue.” To attain peace, we have to do the things that make for peace, and that means deal with what causes conflict and division. To effect reconciliation, we have to do the things that make for reconciliation, and that

---

<sup>1</sup>In an abbreviated form, this article originally appeared in *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* (Nov./Dec., 2000). For further information, go to [www.weavings.org](http://www.weavings.org). Used here by permission.

often involves resistance to wrongs which caused conflicts and rifts in the first place.

### Thrust Into Conflict

Never in my earlier years did I expect to play the role that I have played in the Southern Baptist conflict. My mother used to call me a “yes man” and did not think highly of “yes men.” Having seen so much conflict in my earliest years, however, I did everything I could to steer clear of it. My older brother and I used to fight constantly. That is why, when my mother and father divorced, my mother sent him to live with my aunt and uncle. By age seven I had learned that almost anything was better than to fight. What a shock, then, to find myself speaking out and resisting as fundamentalists asserted control over the Southern Baptist Convention.

What thrust me into the unwelcome spotlight on this was the comment of Bailey Smith, then President of the Southern Baptist Convention, at the National Affairs Briefing of the Republican party in Dallas in 1980 that “God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew.” Sol Bernards, head of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, called me. “Glenn, I have called every Southern Baptist leader I can think of, and not a single one will respond to that statement.” When my suggestion that the president of Southern Seminary where I taught might respond did not pan out, Sol called me back. I said, “Okay. I will make a statement.” I published “An Open Letter to Dr. Bailey Smith.”<sup>2</sup>

I must interject here that the context of Bailey Smith’s comment, the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas in support of the candidacy of Ronald Reagan, alarmed me. There were many signs of a radical political shift toward the far right in 1980, and fundamentalists had just seized control of the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention. I was reading Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>3</sup> and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*<sup>4</sup> and the first volume of Klaus Scholder’s *The Churches and the Third Reich*.<sup>5</sup> Both made much of the failure of people to speak out.

---

<sup>2</sup>“An Open Letter to Dr. Bailey Smith,” *Western Recorder*, September 17, 1980.

<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

<sup>4</sup>Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1965).

<sup>5</sup>Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987). I read the German edition of volume 1.

With as much tact as I could muster, I listed five reasons why Bailey Smith should not have said what he did. First, Jesus was a Jew. You may have disenfranchised Jesus' prayers. Second, you disenfranchised everybody from Abraham to Jesus. Third, Scriptures teach that God hears the prayers of unbelievers. I cited Cornelius in Acts 10. Fourth, this flies in the face of traditional Baptist respect for all persons, believers and nonbelievers alike. Finally, this is the stuff from which Holocausts come.

Fundamentalists exploded. I never spent such an uncomfortable weekend in my life. On Thursday Dr. McCall, President of Southern Seminary, called me into his office and said, "Glenn, you've got to do something about this. This is explosive." I replied, "Dr. McCall, I have a cab waiting for me in front of Norton Hall prepared to take me to the airport. I'm going to Iowa to speak in a Methodist Church. I'll have to do something when I get back." Although I could see that the answer didn't please him, I wheeled around and headed for the taxi.

Not long after I arrived at my destination in Iowa, a colleague called me. "Glenn, you've got to call Dr. McCall. He said he is going to have to make a statement, and it will hurt you." I said, "Okay. I'll call him." His first words when I called were, "Glenn, I'm not going to make a statement." I responded without having the slightest idea what I would do. "Good. I'll do something when I get back." Meanwhile, however, Dr. McCall's out-loud musings in a faculty lounge had gotten to my wife in a garbled form. He had said, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to make a statement. I don't want to because it will kick Glenn in the face." This got to my wife in this form: "If I had Glenn Hinson here I would kick him in the face." She called me crying and wanting me to resign. I said, "No. Not yet. I'm kind of enjoying the notoriety."

Calls kept coming from colleagues all day Friday and Saturday. Some were supportive, some critical. Late Saturday night, however, another colleague called to say, "Glenn, you're a hero!" "I am? All weekend I've been a goat. What happened?" "Well, the *Jerusalem Post* carried your 'Open Letter to Bailey Smith' and included a note which said, 'Had it not been for Glenn Hinson's letter, the Jewish Knesset would have voted to kick all Southern Baptist missionaries out of Israel.'" Sunday evening the "hero" returned visibly relieved. My new status, however, did not last.

Shortly after that, Paige Patterson, now President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary but at that time President of Criswell Bible College in Dallas, published the list of "liberals" teaching in Southern

Baptist seminaries, my name at the top. In support of his identifications, he quoted five statements from a book on Christian origins that I had published in 1978 entitled *Jesus Christ*. Four of the five quotations were statements of views I was *refuting*. Had he quoted the sentence before and the sentence after, everyone would have known that. He has never exercised the courtesy of correcting himself.

In the mid-1980s a Peace Committee report of the Southern Baptist Convention singled me out as one of three liberals teaching in Southern Baptist seminaries.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after this report appeared, a pastor of a small rural church in eastern Tennessee took it upon himself to prevent me from teaching a class at Carson-Newman College and then to have me removed from the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where I had taught for twenty-five years. The precariousness of my situation forced me to search for insight greater than I possessed so that I might respond intelligently and sensitively to the attacks.

Near daily meditation on this matter during three-mile walks to work directed me toward the Apostle Paul and his responses to attacks by other Christians on him and his work. Paul knew and experienced much the same kind of misrepresentation, criticism, hostility, and opposition that I was experiencing. And he responded, not in the way many persons thought I should respond to my attackers, that is, by making any concession necessary for the sake of peace.

### **That Christ Might Be Proclaimed**

Following the lead of Paul, I found myself impaled on the horns of a dilemma, or, more aptly, on the arms of the cross of Jesus Christ. The principle that Paul used to tie everything together was to do everything not for the sake of a superficial peace but for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Doing everything for the sake of the gospel places contrasting demands on believers.

On the one hand, doing everything for the sake of the gospel enabled Paul to endure persecution and imprisonment patiently, gladly enduring the attacks of jealous fellow Christians, humbly earning his living as a bivocational minister rather than as a full-time missionary, and seriously seeking to be “everything to everybody.” In short, he restrained his freedom and his feelings in order that Christ might be proclaimed.

---

<sup>6</sup>Most of the materials that follow were published in *Weavings*, XV (November/December 2000), 40-46, and are used here by permission.

Paul urged others to do the same. For the sake of the gospel the “strong” among the Corinthians and the Romans should forego meat offered as sacrifices in pagan temples lest their freedom occasion the fall of “weak” Christians (1 Cor. 8:3—9:27; 10:23—11:1; Rom. 14:1—15:13). Christians must be sensitive to the consciences of their brothers and sisters. For the sake of the gospel, the strong should be prepared even to practice a bit of deception should one of the weak catch them in the act of eating such meat and remind them of what they were doing (1 Cor. 10:27-30). For the sake of the gospel, the strong must accept and not despise the weak, and the weak must accept and not judge the strong (Rom. 14:1-3).

Thus far the accent falls on flexibility and accommodation. It might appear that we have found the apostle’s formula for reconciliation. Before we celebrate a solution, however, we must observe the very different way Paul reacted toward those who would substitute *another* gospel, which cannot be a gospel, for *the* gospel, Christ himself. Here he made no concessions. He expressed surprise and dismay at the sudden shift of loyalties by the Galatians from the gospel he had preached to a different gospel, which was a perversion of the only gospel of Jesus Christ. In this case the one who could urge concessions toward the weak in reference to meat offered in idol temples now pronounced a curse on the perverters of the gospel. “If we or an angel from heaven should preach another gospel than the one we preached,” Paul thundered, “let that person be anathema” (Gal. 1:8).

In the case of the Judaizers of Philippi, the one who could rejoice that Christ was being preached despite efforts of some to heighten his suffering screamed a warning:

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evildoers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! . . . For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. . . . Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. (Phil. 3:2, 18-19)

Against such, Paul insisted, the Philippians must “stand fast in the Lord.”

Scholars have had difficulty putting these two segments of Philippians together. Early on, some suggested that Paul must have had a bad night after writing the first part of the letter. Others have theorized that Philippians 3:2—4:1 was a separate letter composed in the heat of conflict of another time. Still others wonder whether the same person could have

written both. Having experienced something similar in my own career, I've had less trouble believing the same person could say both things in the same letter to the same group of people. The question we confront is the same as Paul's. Where and how do we draw the line between reconciliation and resistance, between capitulation and confrontation, on the basis of our commitment to God in Jesus Christ, God's "good news" to us?

### **Reconciliation**

I must confess that I don't find it easy to make concessions that may seem to open the way to reconciliation. What Paul says to the Corinthians about his strategy for resolving tensions between himself and those who differ with him makes me uncomfortable. He speaks of making himself a slave to all persons and being all things to all persons so that he might win as many of them as possible (1 Cor. 9:29-31). In light of such a Pauline strategy, I heard myself confronted and chastised, for it forced me to ask whether I was doing *enough* for the sake of the gospel, whether I did *everything* for the sake of the gospel. In the difficult circumstances I faced with elements of the Southern Baptist Convention, did I maintain a firm and unyielding stance because of the gospel or because of myself? Was my position determined by western Enlightenment autonomism, or was it determined by what Paul Tillich called "christonomism," the rule of self or the rule of Christ?

Who among us acts out of pure motives? In my case I know that pride entered into it. Some might say "mule-headedness." After all, I am a Missourian, and I've worked behind and with a lot of mules, both animal and human. I understand the infinite importance of faithfulness largely because of Bertha Brown, my teacher in a one-room country school in the Missouri Ozarks most of the eight years I attended. She was so faithful. Insofar as I know, in all those years she missed only one half-day of school. That was the day it snowed fourteen inches and the temperature dropped to twenty-three below zero. But she got there at noontime. None of her students got there. But I knew she had been there because the fire was burning in the stove when I got there the next morning. You could not bank the old potbellied stoves longer than overnight. When my parents divorced when I was seven, I can remember her putting her hand on my arm as we trudged up those steep, rutted hills and saying, "You can make it, Glenn. You can make it." And I knew I could because she always did.



My Baptist tradition has suffered from autonomism and selfish privatism. “We’ll do what we darn well please.” When a president of the Southern Baptist Convention scolded President Harry Truman, a fellow Baptist, for saying “damn” and “hell” so much in public, Harry replied, “Tell him to mind his own damn business.” But such Baptist autonomism has been costly. The result has been split after split as Baptists have chosen to go their separate ways rather than search for reconciling solutions to their conflicts.

Therefore, I had to examine my motives. Was it autonomism or christonomism that compelled me to say no to those who insisted that persons who taught in Southern Baptist seminaries or worked in other capacities in Southern Baptist agencies or institutions must think and teach what the Southern Baptist Convention, controlled by a powerful political bloc, decided?<sup>7</sup> Was it autonomism or christonomism that made me refuse and even laugh at a unity based on “doctrinal conformity and functional diversity”? Was it autonomism or christonomism that caused me to resent misrepresentations and deliberate distortion of what I and others wrote and taught as a means of rallying political forces? Was it autonomism or christonomism that activated my anger when local Southern Baptist associations banned churches from fellowship because they employed women as pastors? Was it autonomism or christonomism that stirred me to criticize and oppose “America first” political agendas dressed up as “the old time gospel”? Was I doing what I did for the sake of the gospel?

You won’t have to prod me to get me to confess that I am not inerrant and infallible. At times I’ve spoken more harshly about “weak” brothers and sisters than I should have if I did everything for the sake of the gospel. At times I’ve despised and condemned those who differed in doctrine and practice. At times I’ve spoken and acted in ways that may have grieved persons of “weak” conscience. At times I’ve focused too much on my concerns and been insensitive to the concerns of “weak” brothers and sisters. For such offenses I ask God’s forgiveness and the forgiveness of those I’ve offended; they were not done for the sake of the gospel.

---

<sup>7</sup>When Adrian Rogers, Pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis and leading figure in the fundamentalist takeover, was President of the SBC, he stated the view in a stark and comical way: “If we decide that pickles have souls, then those who teach in our seminaries should teach that pickles have souls, or they ought not to take our money.”

## Resistance

Having made my confession and extended my apologies, I come now to say that I also heard echoing down the corridors of my heart and mind Paul's exhortations to *stand fast*. "Christ has freed us for freedom," the apostle declared. "Stand fast, therefore, and do not again submit to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). There are times when we must hear these words as a vocation, when what is presented as the "gospel" by some is not the gospel of Jesus Christ but an alien gospel, preached and promoted in ways not consonant with the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Whether right or not, I discerned an ominous parallel between what was happening in my own denomination and what happened among the churches in Germany during the 1930s. German Christians rallied behind Adolf Hitler and National Socialism and its onslaught against the supposed or imagined menaces of Communism, trade unions, the Jews, and economic strangulation by surrounding countries. Many saw in Hitler a great ally for the churches and their work and went along with his efforts to create a German national church.<sup>9</sup> A few, like Martin Niemoeller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, dared to speak out, but they sounded shrill and strident. "This is Germany," others reminded them. "What you say is not happening and will not happen in Germany." The others kept silent. The silence became still deeper. Then no one dared to speak. Today the silence of millions who died in the concentration camps and on the battlefields of Europe cries out, "Why did you not stand fast?"

During the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1960, Hannah Arendt, herself an escapee from the concentration camps, angered many Jews when she observed that even Jews were guilty of complicity in the extermination of their own. According to Eichmann's testimony and records from the camps, Eichmann enlisted Jewish councils to decide who should live and who should die. Council members went along, reasoning that their fellow

---

<sup>8</sup>My experience in all of this makes me more conscious than ever that "calling" can have different nuances. All of us have a calling to live our lives from the vantagepoint of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Some of us have a calling to serve God in a leadership and ministry capacity. Sometimes, as in this case, though, a calling may be very specific.

<sup>9</sup>The Baptist World Alliance met in Berlin in 1935. Editors of Baptist state papers in the Southern U. S. A. wrote glowing positive letters about the Third Reich.

Jews would be treated more mercifully if Jews decided. Arendt observed this: “There was one important excuse for them: cooperation was gradual and it was difficult indeed to understand when the moment had come to cross a line which never should have been tried.”<sup>10</sup>

Yes, that is the point. It is difficult indeed to know where we have crossed a point of no return in complicity with something that may result in immense evil. That is why it is necessary to stand fast and not allow things to go so far. What would have happened had German Christians, that is, more than the very few, said no? We can only speculate, but we know quite clearly what happened because they did *not* say no. Martin Niemoeller has been quoted as saying:

They came for the Communists and I was not a Communist, so I did not speak up. They came for the Jews and I was not a Jew, so I did not speak up. They came for the trade unionists and I was not a trade unionist, so I did not speak up. They came for the Catholics and I was not a Catholic, so I did not speak up. They came for the Protestants, and there was no one left to speak.

Against this backdrop, I heard a very distinct call in my circumstances to stand fast. The call was to stand fast against an *alien* gospel that was not *the* gospel but one featuring a socio-political agenda fostered by hysteria about the “Communist menace” and obsessed with “getting America back to God.” My vocation was to stand fast against such an *imposed* gospel that could not be *the* gospel, for that gospel is the gospel of the free grace of God. I was to stand fast against the *spirit* in which the whole movement operated, the spirit of ward politics and political conventions, not the spirit of the assembly called together by Jesus Christ.

Having grown up in a badly fractured family, you can easily understand how I responded to this calling. “Me? You mean me, Lord? I’m an irenicist? I’ve spent my life steering around conflict?” I awakened many nights and went downstairs to sit in my rocking chair and hurl those questions at God. The answer always came back, “Yes, Glenn! *YOU!* Hang in there!” My prayer then, as now, is this:

---

<sup>10</sup>Cited in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New York & London: Yale University Press, 1982), 345.

“For the sake of the gospel,” O God, that is my plea.  
For the sake of the gospel help me to lay aside all pettiness and  
meanness of spirit.  
For the sake of the gospel let me find ways to overcome con-  
flict and divisions.  
Yet for the sake of the gospel may I not substitute what is not  
gospel for the gospel or compromise the gospel out of  
fear or betray the gospel out of self-interest.  
For the sake of the gospel help me to stand fast for the gospel.  
For the sake of the gospel help me to be faithful to the gospel.  
And, finally, O God, for the sake of the gospel enable me,  
above all, to distinguish what is gospel from what is not  
the gospel.  
For the sake of the gospel enable me to discern the line I must  
never cross.  
For the sake of the gospel enable me to know when to yield and  
when to stand fast.  
Through Jesus Christ, your gospel. Amen.

# THE HERESIES OF LOVE: TOWARD A SPIRIT-CHRIST ECCLESIOLOGY OF TRIUNE LOVE<sup>1</sup>

by

K. Steve McCormick

## *Notae Ecclesiae* and the Kingdom of God

We believe in the “one,” “holy,” “catholic,” and “apostolic” church.<sup>2</sup> We pray, as Christ has taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” So, how may the church on earth serve the Kingdom of God? What on earth is the church for? What on earth is the church? And what on earth makes the church the church? There is much more to probing the *mission* and the *being* of the church<sup>3</sup> than we have

---

<sup>1</sup>This was the Presidential Address to the Wesleyan Theological Society, delivered by Dr. McCormick on March 2, 2001, at the Society’s annual meeting convened at Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana.

<sup>2</sup>S. Mark Heim, (editor) *Faith To Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991); Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>My ecclesiology has been greatly shaped by the work of John David Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985). Cf. also Zizioulas, “The Church As Communion,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38, No. 1 (1994): 3-16, and “Communion & Otherness,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38, No. 4 (1994): 347-361. Two other sources that have been critical to my thinking and have shaped my direction on this subject: Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

space for here. And yet, these questions about the mission and being of the church, as depicted in the *notae ecclesiae* (“marks of the church”), have not always been grounded in the Kingdom of God. All too often the church’s “way of existing” on earth has patterned life around the kingdom of this world rather than in intercession for this world in the prayer: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>4</sup> The mission and being of the church are “one” in the Spirit, “holy” in the Spirit, “catholic” in the Spirit, and “apostolic” in the Spirit only because they are in the Spirit of Christ who gathers up the people of God on earth for participation in the life of God’s kingdom on earth—as it always was, is, and will be in heaven.<sup>5</sup>

Why is the *koinonia* of the church more splintered and divided than *united*? Why does the church’s “way of being” *holy* seem too often to reflect more the way of sinners than the way of saints, or the way of the earthly kingdom more than the way of the heavenly kingdom? Why do our denominational “differences” continue to validate our divisions, so that our “distinctives” continue to tear at the fabric of the church’s *catholicity*? Why does the church continue to wander adrift in a cloud of ecclesial amnesia without the light of *apostolic* identity graciously enlightening the church, not only with a memory of the past, but an anticipation of the future, so that we can remember now just who and whose we are, as the gathered people of God who wait now in expectation of the eschatological gathering of the “entire people of God” back into the triune communion of God’s kingdom?

All too often, the relation of the church to the Kingdom of God is misconstrued because we forget that most invaluable lesson remembered

---

<sup>4</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

<sup>5</sup>I owe a great deal to the ecumenical vision of Albert C. Outler. Cf. Albert C. Outler, “Methodism in the World Christian Community,” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, edited by Thomas C. Oden, Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 241-250. Outler writes: “The Church is *one* in the Spirit rather than in any of its institutional structures, it is *holy* in the Spirit, who calls and leads the faithful into that holy living without which none shall see the Lord. It is *catholic*, both in terms of Wesley’s “catholic spirit” and in its radical commitment to actual inclusiveness; it is *apostolic* in the Spirit, who once turned a dispirited rabble into a company of witnesses and servants, and can work this same miracle again—as the Spirit has so often in the history of the Christian community” (249). Cf. also the following chapters on Outler’s vision for Methodism: “Visions and Dreams; the Unfinished Business of an Unfinished Church,” 253-262; “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” 211-226; “The Mingling of Ministries,” 227-239.

in the insightful interplay between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*. The “law of prayer” precedes the “law of belief.”<sup>6</sup> Our confession that the church is “one,” “holy,” “catholic,” and “apostolic” arises out of a heart that prays, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” *Ergo credo*, “I believe,” means what I give my heart to. Thus, the church’s worship and prayer are that which forms the church’s doctrine. The law of prayer is the law of faith. In other words, when our prayer, our participation in the triune communion of God’s kingdom, does not form the mission and being of the church, it is because we have prematurely confused the church on earth with the Kingdom of God. The “marks” of the church are the marks of a gathered people who pray to become “like” the Triune God: One church like the One God, a holy people like a holy God, a catholic church like a universally present God, an apostolic church like God who was, is, and will be, forever and ever. Moreover, this insightful interplay between the *law of prayer* and the *law of faith* continues to be a healthy reminder that the church on earth is not the Kingdom of God, and that the church is only “one,” “holy,” “catholic,” and “apostolic” as the church is gathered up into the unity of communion with the Triune God. Jesus prays, “I ask . . . that they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (John 17:21).

My argument is really quite simple: The church’s mission and being as depicted in the “marks of the church” must be grounded in the Kingdom of God “whose name and nature is love.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the transitive charac-

<sup>6</sup>For a most informative and useful discussion of the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* interplay, see chapters 7-8, pp. 218-283, in Geoffrey Wainwright’s *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>BE 7:250-252. This phrase is taken from Charles Wesley’s hymn entitled “Wrestling Jacob.” Come, O thou Traveller unknown,/Whom still I hold, but cannot see!/My company before is gone,/And I am left alone with thee;/With thee all night I mean to stay,/And wrestle till the break of day./I need not tell thee who I am,/My misery or sin declare;/Thyself hast called me by my name,/Look on thy hands, and read it there./But who, I ask thee, who art thou?/Tell me thy name, and tell me now./In vain thou strugglest to get free,/I never will unloose my hold;/Art thou the Man that died for me?/The secret of thy love unfold:/Wrestling, I will not let thee go/Till I thy name, thy nature know./Wilt thou not yet to me reveal/Thy new, unutterable name?/Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell;/To know it now resolved I am:/Wrestling, I will not let thee go/Till I thy name, thy nature know./What though my shrinking flesh complain/And murmur to contend so long?/I rise superior to my pain:/When I am weak, then I am strong;/And when my all of strength shall fail/I shall with the God-man prevail./Yield to me now—for I am weak,/But confident in self-despair!/Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,/Be conquered by

ter of God's kingdom in the triune act of condescending love is always proleptic, ensuring that as the Holy Spirit gathers us together into the body of Christ, inscribing upon our hearts the vestiges of the Holy Trinity, the kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord; the church "becomes by grace what God is by nature."<sup>8</sup> As the Spirit gathers and unites the people of God into one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, the congregation of the faithful eagerly awaits the promise of the new creation<sup>9</sup> as it participates *now* with the "entire people of God" in communion with the Triune God. It truly is as envisioned in the Letter to the Hebrews: "All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not

---

my instant prayer./Speak, or thou never hence shalt move./And tell me if thy name is LOVE./'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thou diedst for me;/I hear thy whisper in my heart./The morning breaks, the shadows flee./Pure Universal Love thou art:/To me, to all, thy bowels move—/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./My prayer hath power with God; the grace/Unspeakable I now receive;/Through faith I see the face to face;/I see the face to face, and live!/In vain I have not wept and strove—/Thy nature, and thy name is, LOVE./I know thee, Saviour, who thou art—/Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend;/Nor wilt thou with the night depart./But stay, and love me to the end:/Thy mercies never shall remove./Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./The Sun of Righteousness on me/Hath rose with healing in his wings;/Withered my nature's strength; from thee/My soul its life and succour brings;/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./Contented now upon my thigh/I halt, till life's short journey end;/All helplessness, all weakness, I/On thee alone for strength depend;/Nor have I power from thee to move:/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./Lame as I am, I take the prey,/Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome;/I leap for joy, pursue my way./And as a bounding hart fly home,/Through all eternity to prove./Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE.

<sup>8</sup>Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 65. Lossky depicts a vision of salvation as consisting in grace and glory, a share in communion with the Holy Trinity: "The goal of orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature, gods created after the uncreated God, possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature."

<sup>9</sup>For one of the best Wesleyan theologies that orient all dimensions of human existence from the eschaton of the new creation, see Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998).



ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. . . . Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect" (NRSV Heb. 11:13-16, 39-40).

### Toward A Spirit-Christ Ecclesiology<sup>10</sup>

Remember Irenaeus' expression "two hands of God" that was used in the church's ecumenical confession: *Ubi Spiritus Sanctus, ibi ecclesia Christi* ("Where the Holy Spirit is, there is the Church of Christ).<sup>11</sup> Thus, according to ecumenical consent, by the "two hands of God" the Son institutes and the Spirit constitutes the church.<sup>11</sup> Therein lies the rub. There has been a longstanding dispute between the hypostatic presence of Christ in the incarnation and the hypostatic presence of the Spirit at Pentecost. It continues to drive and fragment our ecclesiology. As Colin Gunton has noted, what is needed in a Trinitarian ecclesiology is "a reconsideration of the relation of pneumatology and christology, with a consequent reduction of stress on the Church's institution by Christ and a greater emphasis on its constitution by the Spirit."<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, both "presences" are necessary to constitute and institute a "Spirit-Christ" ecclesiology. Furthermore, even though the Spirit is sent "after the Word" and "will not speak on his own, but will speak only what he hears"<sup>13</sup> (Jn. 16:13), it must be said, however, that the church is only "one" in the Spirit, "holy" in the Spirit, "catholic" in the Spirit, and "apostolic" in the Spirit. After all, Pentecost *is* the birth-

<sup>10</sup>It is from the work of Colin Gunton in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) that I first began to see, at least theologically, why most ecclesiologies have not always been grounded in the being of God. Irenaeus' expression the "two hands of God" is necessarily trinitarian and quite often the Church has separated the two. Consequently, the Church's "way of being" does not image that of God because she is not grounded in the Triune God. Cf. chapter 4, "The Community: The Trinity and the Being of the Church," 58-85.

<sup>11</sup>Tremendously helpful in coming to terms with a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology is the excellent work of Ralph Del Colle. See his *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Cf. especially chapter 1, "'The Two Hands of God: Pneumatological Christology in the Orthodox Tradition,'" 8-33.

<sup>12</sup>Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 69.

<sup>13</sup>Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, 28-29.

day of the Church. Since we now live in the age of the Spirit, a new age of salvation history—the last days of the kingdom, the beginning of the new creation, the eschaton,<sup>14</sup> the church is characterized more by the gathered community of Pentecostal witness constituted by the Spirit than by the historical continuation of the incarnation instituted by Christ.

What is the relation between Christ and the church and what is the relation between the Spirit and the church? Why has the relation of Christ instituting and the Spirit constituting the church been so misconstrued? It seems a bit odd that the Spirit would usher in a new age at Pentecost, “marking” the church as “one,” “holy,” “catholic,” and “apostolic” only to have the mission of Christ overshadow the constituting mission of the Spirit. What have been the consequences? Why does the church not always believe that Pentecost means that what the Spirit did for Christ in the mission of the incarnation, the Spirit will do for the church on earth as it is in heaven? A line in one of Charles Wesley’s hymns that has sustained me for a long time expresses this unswerving confidence that the Spirit who led Christ will also lead the church: “By thy unerring Spirit led,/We shall not in the desert stray; . . . /Or miss our providential way;/ . . . /While love, almighty love, is near.”<sup>15</sup> Conversely, since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, why does the church often forget that the mission of the church is to be in conformity to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? Why has the mission of the Spirit often disassociated from the instituting mission of Christ? What have been the consequences? A few observations are in order to move us in the direction of a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology.

When the church’s focus on the instituting mission of Christ eclipses the constituting mission of the Spirit, the church is lost as the gathered people of God in anticipation of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God in the new creation. The church no longer looks to the future in anticipation of God’s coming kingdom—the new creation; now the church looks to the past and all the necessary historical continuity it can find to determine and establish institutional unity, authority, and power. As the church looks backwards, the new creation is realized and the church prematurely universalizes the institution of the church with all the divine

---

<sup>14</sup>I continue to move in the direction of both Moltmann and Pannenberg at this point.

<sup>15</sup>BE 7: 472.

authority and power that was invested in Christ. Often we have heard the church prematurely say that the voice of God is the voice of the church. If Pentecost teaches us anything, it teaches us that the action of the Spirit, according to Gunton, “is to anticipate, in the present and by means of the finite and contingent, the things of the age to come . . . it is only through the Spirit that the human actions of Jesus become ever and again the acts of God. Has the historical church made the mistake of claiming a premature universality for her works and words instead of praying for the Spirit and leaving the outcome to God?”<sup>16</sup> A church on earth that does not exist in anticipation of the new creation cannot be the church.

When the Church finds its exclusive identity in the constituting mission of the Spirit at the expense of the instituting mission of Christ, the tendency is to particularize the institution of the church by disassociating with the apostolic identity and historical continuity of the church. As the church no longer looks to the past for identity in the present and direction in the future, it is no longer catholic. There exists a sort of institutional defiance for the sake of the kind of freedom and unpredictable responsiveness that comes by way of the Spirit. This drive for plurality and even novelty, in tension with the opposite drive for monism, seems to be a distinguishing trait of the church that forgets the mission of Christ because apostolic memory is lost in the particularizing of the church. A church that is not apostolic cannot be catholic.

A church instituted by Christ that is not enlivened by the Spirit is like a body without life, history without a future, universality without particularity. A church of the Spirit without Christ is freedom without purpose, life without meaning, energy without a direction, particularity without universality. If the church is only one, holy, catholic and apostolic *in the Spirit*, the church is also only one in the body of Christ, only holy in conformity to Christ, only catholic in its redemption for all in Christ, and only apostolic in continued faithful witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In short, only a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology constitutes a congregation as the faithful, filled with the energy of triune love.

So why has the congregation of the faithful not always participated in the name and nature of God? My simple answer, contained in my thesis, is that the church ceases to be the church when its way of being and mission

---

<sup>16</sup>Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 68.

no longer reflect the way of triune love.<sup>17</sup> The Spirit-Christ ecclesiology that we are exploring is necessarily Trinitarian. Thus, the church that participates in the Kingdom of God is a church that is shaped and “marked” by the energy of the Spirit, the energy of triune love. Conversely, the church that does not reflect the life of Christ’s relation to the church or the life of the Spirit’s relation to the church cannot be the church. Again, it is the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, who “marks” the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The breath of the Spirit at Pentecost is the energy of triune love. Thus, the church’s way of existing on earth is to reflect the way triune Love exists in heaven, and the church can only share in the life of triune communion as it is gathered up into God’s kingdom.

The basis for a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology, and consequently our adoption into the family of God, rests on God sending the Spirit of God’s Son into our hearts, enabling us to cry “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6). The mission of Christ in the incarnation, coupled with the necessary mission of the Spirit in Pentecost, iconically opens up a window into the household of God “whose name and nature is Love,” and enables the church to participate in the life of God, a life of triune love. The “two hands of God” essentially exegetes the Holy Trinity for us, and consequently is a pattern for the

---

<sup>17</sup>Particularly helpful in the background of this thesis has been the work of Colin W. Williams in *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 4, *The Church*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968). Williams argues in chapter 3, “The Traditional Views Reexamined: Catholic, Classical Protestant, and Free Church Views,” that the Church tends to fragment with its emphasis on either of the following ecclesial types: 1) a “Catholic horizontal view” symbolized by God the Father and stresses that the true Church is found in unbroken continuity of ministry, creeds, liturgy, and Sacraments; 2) a “classical Protestant objective vertical view” symbolized by God the Son as the One who in the event of faith calls the Church into existence through the preached Word and proper administration of the Sacraments; 3) a “free church Protestant subjective vertical view” symbolized by God the Spirit, and accents the free response of believers to the Spirit who opens new forms of faith and obedience. Williams’ contention is that the trinitarian doctrine of perichoresis suggests that a healthy ecclesiology is not only inclusive of each ecclesial type, but that all three types must be fused in a trinitarian ecclesiology. “If the Son [writes Williams] “proceeds from the Father, and the Spirit from the Father and the Son, this may suggest that the objective vertical view has to be held within the prior framework of the Father’s concern for the whole created order, with its created continuities and cosmic context, and that the subjective vertical must be protected from uncontrolled freedom by being placed under proper Christological control” (55).

church, a “way of being” that images the “way of Triune Love.”<sup>18</sup> This Love originates “from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is effected in the Spirit;” the Spirit gathers up the body of Christ, and with renewed and grateful hearts, the church responds in love, in the energy of the Spirit, through conformity to the Son, and back to the Father. Love is completed and returned, but always is open-ended. Love is always open because it gives and receives. Love is forever open because it must always be returned.

This return of love occupies the central concern of Wesleyan ecclesiology.<sup>19</sup> Participation in triune love is the hermeneutical key to understanding the correlation of a Wesleyan ecclesiology that must be grounded in the new creation. At the center of the Christian life, for both John and Charles Wesley, was an unshakable conviction that to be created in the image of God means that we were made to “know” and “love” God.<sup>20</sup> “Love” and “knowledge” of the “Three-One God” was so thoroughly “interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion”<sup>21</sup> that when the Spirit of the “Three-One God” is poured into our hearts, both brothers were convinced that we will come to know and love the God whose “name and nature is love.” This was the constant refrain of the Wesleyan hymns and sermons alike, shaping at the deepest level their understanding of the mission and being of the church. After all, it is the Holy Spirit, “the immediate cause of all holiness in us,”<sup>22</sup> who gathers us together into the body of Christ, inscribing upon our hearts the vestiges of

---

<sup>18</sup>Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, “Spirit-christology is after all a model that exegeses the divine economy. The risen Christ cannot be understood to be the “sender” of the Spirit if the incarnate Christ is not already the “bearer” of the Spirit” (29).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Wesley’s Sermons, “Of the Church,” BE 3:45-57; “On Schism,” BE 3:58-69. Cf. also “Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England,” *Works* (Jackson) 13:225-231, and “Of Separation from the Church,” *Works* (Jackson) 13:255-257.

<sup>20</sup>BE 7:398. Hymn 256: O all-creating God,/At whose supreme decree/Our body rose, a breathing clod, Our souls sprang forth from thee./For this thou hast designed,/And formed us man for this, To know, and love thyself, and find/In thee our endless bliss.

<sup>21</sup>BE 2:385. Cf. also Geoffrey Wainwright, “Why Wesley Was A Trinitarian,” *The Drew Gateway*, volume 59, Number 2 (Spring 1990): 26-43.

<sup>22</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978), “A Letter to a Roman Catholic,” 82. 10:80-86.

triune Love, so that “we become by grace what God is by nature,” namely, “transcripts of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>23</sup>

### **The Heresies of Love**

The “marks of the church” are the “marks” of Triune Love. As the church participates in the life of triune communion, the congregation of the faithful becomes one (united), holy, catholic, and apostolic. This is because God, whose name and nature is Love, is the Holy Trinity, the One who is One God, holy in nature, catholic in presence, and constantly (as in apostolic continuity) the Three-One God who was, who is, and who will be, forever and ever Triune Love. So, we love because God first loved us. Thus, the church can only be “one” by her love. Only love can unite the church. The church can only be “holy” in ecstatic love. Triune love is always ecstatically “thrown out,” and therefore, the church can only be holy in the same “thrown out” ecstatic love. The church can only be catholic by love. After all, the freedom of love, the freedom of the Spirit is that which “places” the church “anywhere” and “everywhere.” The church can only be apostolic by love. Love is that which gives it identity, continuity, and relationality with “all the people of God.” Love gives the church identity with a memory of the past as well as an anticipation of the future, so we can love now with the same love “everywhere, always, and by all.”

My argument has been that the church must be grounded in the Kingdom of God whose name and nature is love. As the gathered people of God participate in the life of God’s Kingdom, the life of triune love, the church becomes marked with the marks of triune communion. The marks of the church are indeed the marks of Triune Love. Now, in tandem with this claim, I propose a corollary argument. Inasmuch as the heresies addressed by Nicea were about God, and the central confession of the church at the Council of Nicea was that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that God’s name and nature is Love, thus those very heresies were essentially the heresies of love. Put simply, since God is love, all heresies about God are heresies of love.

There is much wisdom and guidance to be mined in the heresies of the church, not simply because they impugn the church’s “grammar of faith” in creed and dogma, but because they threaten the church’s unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity; they threaten the church’s love. The wisdom of

---

<sup>23</sup>BE 7:88.

trinitarian heresy is discovered in how and why the church cannot love; and when the church cannot return triune love, the church cannot become marked as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Even some of Wesley's harshest words in his sermon "On Schism" seem to bear this out, for he considered any breach of unity a "breach of the law of love." Although "the pretenses for separation may be innumerable," the "want of love is always the real cause."<sup>24</sup> The "heresies of love" are the heresies of schism. So when the church cannot participate in the ecstatic love of God's Kingdom, the church cannot be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

What is the most basic insight to be found in the trinitarian heresies that would move us closer to a church that is one in *koinonia*, holy in ecstatic love, catholic in communion "anywhere" and "everywhere," and apostolic in identity and memory with the "entire people of God?" What can we learn about triune love from the truth and error of Arianism, Modalism, and Tritheism?<sup>25</sup> How do the heresies of love genuinely attempt to protect the nature of God and, unfortunately, at the same time prohibit God from being in name and nature Love? What can we learn about the name and nature of God as love from the truths and half-truths of trinitarian heresy so that the church can be a church "marked" by triune love?

If we return to the "universalizing" or "particularizing" tendencies of the church, we are reminded again that a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology is not in place. Moreover, this ongoing drive for ecclesial monism or denominational distinctiveness, unity and diversity, continues to illumine how the church's "way of existing" is not always the way of triune love. These tendencies are quickly noticeable in the way in which the trinitarian heresies of love spoke of the being of God. For example, a modalistic understanding that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not persons ontologically but roles assumed by the one "static" God, a God who is "*stasis*" and not "*ek-stasis*,"<sup>26</sup> naturally lends

<sup>24</sup>BE 3:64.

<sup>25</sup>There is much to glean in both the positive and negative consequences of these heresies that opens up all kinds of new possibilities for thinking about ecclesiology. My most basic contention is that they teach the church how to be, as God is—Love. Unfortunately, I am only able to introduce the direction of this in the scope of this address.

<sup>26</sup>G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK 1936), 113f. Cf. also John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, edited by Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 44-60. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 401-447.

itself to the kind of ecclesial rationale that prematurely universalizes the institution of the church. A modalistic ecclesiology eclipses the particularity of the church for the sake of unity and universality. A tritheistic tendency in ecclesiology moves in the direction of fragmenting the institution of the church and stresses diversity because it does not take seriously the unity or oneness of God. Arianism seems to dissolve both the universal and particular mission and being of the church because Christ is finally “suspended between man and God, identical with neither but related to both.”<sup>27</sup> Neither unity nor diversity is possible in an ecclesiology that moves in the direction of Arius.

What is missing in these three heresies is a “Spirit-Christ” ecclesiology that illumines for the church a way of being as God is—Love. The energy of the Spirit that empowered the Son to do the will of the Father was the energy of love. Jesus did not have the Word (*Logos*) acting immediately or directly upon him,<sup>28</sup> but had to face God in the same way in which we do and “learn obedience through what he suffered . . . and having been made perfect” (Hebrews 5:8) by the energy of love, the energy of the Spirit, fulfilled in all ways the will of the Father. These heresies of love become heresies of schism because the nature of “being” is such that God’s being is not relational or communal.

Let us return to the “two hands of God” in our Spirit-Christ ecclesiology. The relation of Christ and the Spirit reveals the way the church does the will of God the Father on earth as it is and always has been in heaven. As the “two hands of God,” and not just the hypostatic presence of Christ or the hypostatic presence of the Spirit, exegetes the Holy Trinity, they show the gathered people of God how to become One in fellowship, holy in ecstatic love, catholic in communion “anywhere” and “everywhere,” apostolic in identity and memory with all the people of God, in anticipation of the eschatological gathering in the new creation. Both *constituting* and *instituting* “Presences” will do for the church on earth, in anticipation of the new creation, what the Spirit did for Christ in the mission of the

---

<sup>27</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 198.

<sup>28</sup>I have found particularly helpful to a Spirit-Christ ecclesiology the work of Alan Spence, “Christ’s Humanity and Ours: John Owen,” in *Persons Divine And Human*, edited by Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 74-97.



incarnation. It is the “unerring Spirit” of triune love poured into our hearts who will ensure that the gathered people of God will love, as God is love.

### Conclusion

In closing, we should be reminded that it is the Holy Spirit who pours out the love of God in our hearts, and inscribes upon those hearts the vestiges of the Holy Trinity, ensuring that, as the gathered people of God in anticipation of the new creation, we will have become the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church with the entire people of God. This much I know: the “unerring Spirit” will not let us “miss our providential way” so that “when we rise in love renewed, Our souls resemble thee, An image of the triune God to all eternity.”<sup>29</sup>

Captain of Israel’s host, and guide/Of all who seek the land  
above,/Beneath thy shadow we abide,/The cloud of thy pro-  
tecting love:/Our strength thy grace, our rule thy Word,/Our  
end, the glory of the Lord./By thy unerring Spirit led,/We shall  
not in the desert stray;/We shall not full direction need,/Or  
miss our providential way;/As far from danger as from  
fear,/While love, almighty love, is near.<sup>30</sup>

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

---

<sup>29</sup>BE 7:389-390.

<sup>30</sup>BE 7:472.

# RECONCILING CLASHING ECUMENICAL VISIONS: THE CHURCH OF GOD (ANDERSON) AND THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

by

Barry L. Callen

The Free Methodist Church was formed in 1860 and essentially duplicated the polity of the church body from which its first members were departing. The Church of God (Anderson) movement evolved two decades later and rejected the legitimacy of humanly operated polities in general. These two new bodies, both vigorous holiness representatives with much in common, nonetheless differed widely in their views of the church and its intended life. This difference in how the Bible is to be read in regard to church governance persists yet today and is at the root of some of the diversity present in the Wesleyan Theological Society. The sharp nineteenth-century rhetoric of this difference is greatly muted today, but remembering the awkward path from then to now is worth the effort.

J. Paul Taylor, former bishop of the Free Methodist Church, explored in his 1960 book *Goodly Heritage* the great tradition shared by all Protestants. He wrote out of an abiding conviction that “the present cannot be severed from the past without jeopardizing the future. The Church has a family tree, and it would be as fatal to cut the tree down for firewood as to sleep self-complacently in its shadow.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the study at hand intends neither the firewood nor the complacency attitude toward the church’s past. Instead, recalled here is an awkward era of strong polemics

---

<sup>1</sup>J. Paul Taylor, *Goodly Heritage* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1960), 3.

between two holiness bodies, the positive shift in this relationship in more recent decades, and the lessons that appear important for the future. It is a study of clashing ecumenical visions, differing visions of how authority should be configured in church life, and avenues to reconciliation.

It certainly is the case that organizations, including church organizations honored by God, have their human sides and experience their own life cycles. The early twenty-first-century versions of the Free Methodist Church and the Church of God movement (Anderson) are significantly different in many ways from their organizational, cultural, ecumenical, and rhetorical lives at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even so, recalling how it was then offers perspective about how things got to be the way they now are and may yield some wisdom about how the Holiness Movement might better proceed in matters of church form, freedom, and unity. In the 1880-1900 period, there appeared to be a rather volatile continuum on the “church question.” For most involved, the question was whether or not committed holiness advocates should remain in “the mother church” or form new holiness sects. Some like Daniel Steele and Henry Clay Morrison never withdrew. Others like Daniel Warner withdrew completely and disdained the whole sect-making scene, helping to set off a strenuous debate in the holiness movement. Many holiness leaders decried come-out-ism and favored remaining loyal to the established church and being holiness leaven from within.

One extreme of this “church question” continuum was Methodism’s episcopal church government model, a disciplined connectionalism to which holiness advocates were called to be loyal in the midst of their reforming enthusiasm. The other extreme was represented by John P. Brooks and Daniel S. Warner (Church of God, Anderson). Theirs was a cry of “democratic” reaction that idealized a strong congregationalism in active opposition to the “Babylon” of divisive and intolerable denominations. They called holiness believers to abandon all sects and stand free in God’s one church, unencumbered by heavy human hands. Martin Wells Knapp represented the attempt to find a middle position. A loyal Methodist, Knapp, W. B. Godbey, and other vigorous holiness advocates increasingly felt pressure to move away from their unqualified denominational loyalty. They decried the anti-sectarianism of a Warner as itself highly sectarian, something promoting religious anarchy, but recognized that true holiness is an interdenominational reality. Thus, they tried to effect holiness fellowship on a *non-sectarian* (not *anti-sectarian*) basis, being

open equally to denominational loyalists and come-outers.<sup>2</sup> The result in part was an eventual moving back into denominationalism (formation of the Pilgrim Holiness Church), although *The Revivalist* holiness publication and God’s Bible School have sought to continue representing Knapp’s middle way.<sup>3</sup>

Four decades before the opening of the twentieth century, some holiness advocates including B. T. Roberts had been “put out” of Methodism and had moved immediately to form a new denomination, the Free Methodist Church. Such seemingly unqualified acceptance of denominationalism by dedicated holiness people (one extreme of the continuum) set the stage for a clash with the later anti-sectarians (the other extreme).

### **Reluctant Denominationalism: The Free Methodist Church**

In the 1880 to 1910 period, any denomination like the Free Methodist Church that understood itself to be a holiness body in the historical stream of orthodox Christianity would clash with a reform (even “restorationist”) movement like the Church of God (Anderson). This movement was insisting that no “denomination” could possibly be a contemporary representation of the church God intends—the pure and undivided New Testament Church. A survey of the tension-filled relationship between the Free Methodist Church and the Church of God movement during the decades 1880-1920 demonstrates the sharp contrast that inevitably arose when a holiness denomination with a positive view of its own existence and role under God was challenged by highly motivated Christian reformers who were “caught up” in the zeal of an ecumenical ideal based on a “second work of grace” (largely as taught by Free Methodists). The Church of God lacked patience with what it saw as the Free Methodist Church’s church-compromising and mission-hindering sectarianism. Free Methodist leaders responded with their own impatience over what they saw as an excessively idealistic movement that was itself dividing the church by its ecumenical extremism.

---

<sup>2</sup>In fact, this middle way of Knapp is not very different from the early position of Daniel S. Warner. However, when Warner was refused full fellowship with the holiness association in Indiana merely because he no longer held formal denominational credentials, he became a radical come-outer.

<sup>3</sup>See the centennial history of God’s Bible School by Wallace Thornton (*Back to the Bible*, 2000).

The spirit of prosperity, the growing social respectability of being a Methodist, and the many second and third-generation Methodists who had come into the church on convictions passively accepted from their families, were causing great unrest in the religious world of America in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Holiness revivalism had evolved values, patterns, and relationships that were expected to characterize committed believers. Urbanizing America and the increasing “establishment” position of Methodism was experiencing a contrasting evolutionary pattern. This pattern was viewed increasingly by many holiness people as disturbingly negative. They saw a drift toward “worldliness” and an abandonment of Wesleyan foundations.

This erosion was perceived by some to be at a serious stage in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in western New York. Beginning in the early 1850s a division had developed between a group of ministers pastoring the larger city churches, especially in the Buffalo area, and the more conservative ministers of the small town and rural churches. The two parties within this conference were the “Buffalo Regency,” distinguished by their “liberal” standards of conduct and belief, including a non-Wesleyan view of entire sanctification, and the “Nazaries” who contended that

Methodist rules as to amusement and dress were disregarded; that there was no insistence upon conversion; that the doctrines of Methodism were obscured; that the secret-society men had control of the conference; and above all they felt that the doctrine of holiness as taught by John Wesley and the early Methodists was neglected and sometimes rejected.<sup>4</sup>

Benjamin T. Roberts (1823-1893), a Genesee Conference minister and “Nazarene” leader, had been influenced in his early years by revivalism, abolitionism (slavery), and holiness perfectionism.<sup>5</sup> In 1857 he published an article titled “New School Methodism” in *The Northern Independent*, a religious news journal devoted mainly to the reform of slavery. His comprehensive criticism of the prevailing condition of the conference was taken by the “Regency Party” as the opportunity for a showdown. Donald Bastian recounts the grim story:

---

<sup>4</sup>C. L. Howland, *A Brief Story of Our Church* (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), 9.

<sup>5</sup>Howard A. Snyder, “Formative Influences on B. T. Roberts,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (34:1, Spring 1999), 177-199.

Roberts was charged at the annual conference and committed to trial. He was convicted and reproved by the bishop. What charge could be leveled for the publication of an article which no one was even willing to refute? Nothing less than “immoral and unchristian conduct.” Then, at the same annual meeting he was appointed to serve a church at Pekin, New York, to which he went without complaint (it was generally thought to be a “dead-end” congregation). . . . But the fracture was beyond healing. A second charge was brought against him when a layman, without Robert’s permission, republished “New School Methodism.” . . . Roberts was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church along with another clergyman. . . . Besides, hundreds of sympathetic layman had been deprived of their membership for no reason except that they were in sympathy with an effort to keep the doctrines and practices of historic Methodism alive.<sup>6</sup>

Roberts and hundreds of like-minded laypersons, having no desire to separate themselves from their parent church, found themselves involuntary “spiritual nomads,” destitute of any church home. But they were too deeply committed to the Methodist principles of fellowship and doctrine to remain disconnected indefinitely. Accordingly, with hesitation and only following a final appeal to the General Conference in 1860, a group of laypersons and fifteen ministers met in conference at Pekin, New York, on August 23, 1860. There, on the farm of I. M. Chesbrough, they took what they saw as the only course left. They organized a new denomination. The new group was named the “Free Methodist Church” because the adjective “free” reflected the crucial issues of the denomination’s origin. Its founders agreed that it was to be marked by freedom from human slavery, secret societies, purchased seats in churches, and any human binding of the Spirit in worship. Roberts was elected as the first superintendent.

The Free Methodist Church was a body with a positive sense of group identity. This is seen in its 1862 *Discipline* where the denomination’s stated mission was “to maintain the biblical standard of Christianity and to preach the gospel to the poor.” A positive sense of identity also is seen in

---

<sup>6</sup>Donald N. Bastian, *The Mature Church Member* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1963), 18-19. The Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at its 1910 session in Rochester, New York, made full acknowledgement of the wrong done to B. T. Roberts fifty years before. The credentials unjustly taken from him were restored to his son.

a more recent editorial in the *Free Methodist* that refers to this denomination as “this truly New Testament church.”<sup>7</sup> In *A Future with a History*, David McKenna speaks of the founding of this denomination in 1860 as the “reluctant” birthing of a “free church.” He adds: “Pulled by conviction and pushed by injustice,” this new church body emerged and could be categorized as a “sect” because of its “revivalistic fervor, its emphasis upon personal holiness, and its freedom from the constraints of an institutionalized structure.”<sup>8</sup> Howard Snyder reports this:

It would be inaccurate to conclude that this schism occurred solely, or probably even chiefly, over doctrinal issues. It appears that a schism was inevitable, regardless of the issues. The division between the urban-liberal and rural-conservative ministers was so deep that it could scarcely have been healed. On the one hand, the liberal group felt threatened because of the increasing effectiveness and popularity of Roberts and others; on the other hand, the closely-knit liberal group, bound together by widespread membership in the Masons, was increasingly violating what Roberts and his followers felt to be essential standards of Christian and church life.<sup>9</sup>

This new Methodist body was seeking to “spread holiness across the land” (a denominational slogan and priority) and attempting to do so with a sense of freedom from former ecclesiastical bondage—“freedom” and “holiness” were its key words. A clear conviction of the group was that the denomination was not the result of schism in the popular and negative sense. Interprets Donald Bastian, “ours is a church born of necessity!”<sup>10</sup> Serious believers had found a bond of fellowship in holiness rather than in ecclesiasticism and social compromise. And they grew. By the 1880s, the Free Methodist Church was widespread over the geographical area in which the Church of God movement was by then beginning to take significant root (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan in particular).

<sup>7</sup>Editorial, *The Free Methodist* (November 22, 1966), 4.

<sup>8</sup>David L. McKenna, *A Future with a History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church* (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Press, 1995), 12, 17-18. McKenna, when speaking of a “sect” in this way, refers to the definition of Ernst Troeltsch in his *The Social Teaching of the Churches*, 1981, 1:331-342.

<sup>9</sup>Howard A. Snyder, “Unity and the Holiness Churches,” Bachelor of Divinity thesis presented to Asbury Theological Seminary, 1966, 29.

<sup>10</sup>Bastian, op. cit., 22.

The increasing contact of the young Free Methodist Church with an even younger and also fast-growing holiness reform movement, the Church of God, was characterized by considerable friction between them. The core of the clash involved somewhat differing group agendas and a contrasting assessment of the rightness and inevitability of denominations existing at all within the body of Christ. So far as early Free Methodists were concerned, they were in existence as a distinct body of believers because of New Testament conviction and the thrust of circumstances that they did not create. Wrote B. T. Roberts in 1883:

If being filled with the Spirit splits the church, then it ought to be split. If a church is in danger of becoming a charnel house, full of dead men's bones, there should be a resurrection. . . . When Christians cannot, in conscience, agree with those with whom they are associated, in matters of primary importance, they should separate from them. . . . This should never be effected unless it becomes strictly necessary.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this willingness to effect separation among Christians under some circumstances, the Free Methodist Church featured what it judged a legitimate "ecumenical" dimension. B. T. Roberts insisted that "the division of the church into sects tends to promote its unity and efficiency." One can "belong to a sect without being a sectarian." Pointing a critical finger at groups like the young Church of God movement, he added that "the most unrelenting sectarians are among the advocates of no-sect principles."<sup>12</sup> Roberts had an irenic spirit and represented the Free Methodist Church in 1883 as it became a charter member of the new World Methodist Council. Soon after, this denomination also became a stalwart member of the National Holiness Association. To the Church of God movement, this was hardly the direction for nurturing true Christian unity.

### **The Church of God in Active Opposition**

The young Church of God movement had an ecumenical vision that decried organizational alliances as an appropriate approach of to the dilemma of Christian disunity. It tended to see as self-serving nonsense the assertion that dividing the church into sects actually can promote Christian

---

<sup>11</sup>B. T. Roberts, "Church Organizations," editorial in *The Earnest Christian* (June 1883), 167-168.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



unity and efficiency. One of the initiating acts that launched this movement of the Church of God was Daniel S. Warner's leaving the National Holiness Association in 1881 because of its insistence on members holding valid denominational credentials.<sup>13</sup> He then reported the following in the *Gospel Trumpet* (June 1, 1881): "The Spirit showed me the inconsistency of repudiating sects and yet belonging to an association that is based on sect recognition. . . . We wish to co-operate with all Christians, as such, in saving souls—but forever withdraw from all organisms that uphold and endorse sects and denominations in the body of Christ." The early years of the Church of God movement featured the stridency of a prophetic voice, not the gentleness of an irenic spirit. True and divinely-intended unity among Christians was understood to be a by-product of heart holiness, not an engineered arrangement among humanly originated and dominated church structures. The result of this view was a clash of ecumenical visions by two holiness bodies with much in common otherwise.

The Church of God movement, much like the Free Methodist Church, came into being only reluctantly. Its primary pioneer, Daniel S. Warner (1842-1895),<sup>14</sup> had lost his ministerial credentials, in large part because he also was loyal to the serious preaching of Christian holiness. In his case, the body that rejected him was the Churches of God of North America (Winebrennerian).<sup>15</sup> There, however, the similarity with B. T. Roberts tends to end. The holiness ministry of Warner included a call for the renewed holiness of individual believers *and* of the church itself, understood in part as a complete rejection of the denominationalism that burdened and divided it. To Warner, being holy as individual believers and together as Christ's body had dramatic implications for the chaotic Christianity he observed on all hands. His was a holiness-inspired ecumenical vision not prepared to tolerate quietly other holiness teachers who professed the holiness experience and yet remained blind to much of the corporate implications that should flow from it. Warner intended to form no new "church," being determined to avoid compounding the arena of

<sup>13</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *It's God's Church!: The Life and Legacy of Daniel S. Warner* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1995), 90ff.

<sup>14</sup>No one is accorded the title "founder" since the early pioneers of this movement were intending to return to the early and one church, not to "found" anything.

<sup>15</sup>See Richard Kern, *John Winebrenner: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Reformer* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Central Publishing House, 1974).

division. He claimed to “see” the *one* church first formed at Pentecost and intended to live in it *alone*.

A “movement consciousness” soon evolved among the “evening light saints,” even though standard denominational characteristics were resisted vigorously and were critiqued sharply when existing in other Christian settings.<sup>16</sup> The early publications of the Church of God movement, for instance, were prone to attack the Free Methodist Church by name. Many *Gospel Trumpet* articles and editorials imply or boldly state that in numerous ways the “F. M. Sect” was sufficiently akin to the Evening Light, and yet so fundamentally different at the key point of the unity of God’s church, that it was to be recognized as an especially dangerous and subtle trap of sectarianism. Holiness denominations so smacked of the ideal without being the ideal that they appeared to leaders of the early Church of God movement as especially undermining the ideal itself.

On one occasion B. T. Roberts offered a definition for “sect” which was soon made notorious thanks to D. S. Warner and some of his reforming colleagues. Roberts defined a “sect” as follows:

The word “sect” is from the Latin “secare,” to cut off, to separate. The word “section” is from the same root. Hence, a section is a portion cut off, or separated from a body of which it forms a part. A sect of Christians is a part of the entire Christian body, separated from the rest by some peculiar doctrines or tenets, which they hold exclusively or to which they give especial prominence.<sup>17</sup>

Warner readily admitted that this definition is accurate, but he could not understand “how any man of ordinary intelligence can thus define sects, as separate, cut-off portions from the body of Christ, by some exclusive party doctrines, and then turn around and say it is right thus to sever the general body of Christ into fragments. . . . It well demonstrates the fact a *heretic* (i.e., *sectarian*) ‘is subverted and sinneth.’ ”<sup>18</sup>

B. T. Roberts, hardly considering sectarian division as ideal in church life, nonetheless could see it in a light far more positive than “sin.” An edi-

---

<sup>16</sup>See John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity* (Anderson, IN.: Warner Press, 1980), chapter five.

<sup>17</sup>As quoted by Daniel Warner, *The Church of God or What Is the Church and What Is Not*, 25.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26.

torial in the *Free Methodist* clarified the attitude of the Free Methodist Church about denominationalism:

Notwithstanding the fact that the existence of religious bodies under different names or denominations has been the subject of attack (sometimes quite virulent attack), nevertheless, such denominations have played a very important part in the *permissive* providence of God both in aggressive work and in conserving true doctrine. True, that which has been accomplished largely under the incentive of denominational zeal ought to have been accomplished from other motives—from the love of God and our fellows; but it is better that it were accomplished under denominational zeal than not at all.<sup>19</sup>

Roberts insisted on the following in another editorial in *The Earnest Christian* (1885):

Any religious organization or association composed of Christians, that acts and worships permanently together and does not include all the Christians of that place or country is of necessity a sect. There is no possibility of avoiding it. It may call itself by the most general name that can be found [Church of God?]. That makes no difference. . . . The one who makes opposition to sects the pretext for trying to get up another sect presumes most wonderfully upon the ignorance and the credulity of mankind. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of such justification of sects and accusation of sect opposers, leaders of the young Church of God movement used the Free Methodist stance as fuel for their anti-sectarian fires. J. W. Byers quotes the definition of Roberts in his tract entitled *Sects*<sup>21</sup> and A. B. Palmer refers to it in the context of his lamenting that “it seems so strange that GREAT men, such as Johnson, and Alexander Campbell of the Christian and Disciple orders and many others teach either directly or indirectly that sectism is not of God, and then remain in them.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Editorial, *The Free Methodist* (February 3, 1886), 8.

<sup>20</sup>Editorial, *The Earnest Christian*, XLIX:6 (June, 1885), 184-85. If the idealism of the early Church of God movement is to be taken seriously, the one thing it was *not* doing was intending to “get up another sect” for any reason!

<sup>21</sup>J. W. Byers, *Sects* (Gospel Trumpet Company, n.d.).

<sup>22</sup>A. B. Palmer, “Extracts,” *Gospel Trumpet* (January 28, 1892), 1.

Bishop Sims of the Free Methodist Church reintroduced the definition of Roberts when he wrote a tract called “No-Sectism.” He thought that his own denomination was distinguished from other Christians only because a bold stand for truth (holiness) had forced it to be so. Could this be sin? Hardly. He argued that the no-sectism antagonizers from the Christian fringe (Warner in particular) ought to be answered. Warner reacted quickly and forcefully to this tract with a fifty-page booklet, also called *No-Sectism*, in which he responded point by point to Sims’ attempt to clarify and justify Roberts’ definition of a sect. Note, for example:

All sect-apologists, as far as we have known, until F. M. zealots, have fought for their party idol under the cloak of the church. But since Mr. Roberts has written a book in defense of his young daughter of the harlot family [reference to the imagery in the Book of Revelation], in which he unguardedly called it a sect; and since men have become more enlightened by the present truth [vision of the Church of God movement], they find it impossible to longer deceive the people. Therefore they are forced to confess that what they, and their creed falsely call a church [such as the Free Methodist denomination], is nothing but a human fraud, a “cut off” from the body of Christ. And yet they have the audacity to wink at the sin of sectism. . . . They are therefore the boldest heretics we know on earth.<sup>23</sup>

Sims had defined “no-sectism” as “the theory of those who believe that all sects are of the devil, and, consequently, that it is a sin for one to belong to them.”<sup>24</sup> Warner clearly represented this definition, but he vigorously disassociated himself from all “isms,” even “no-sectism.”

Some groups, Warner explained, make the idea of separation from modern sects their central emphasis. But he did not. His own understanding was that Christ and not “come out of her” was the center and genius of his own teaching and that of the group he represented.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Sims and the other Free Methodists seem to have seen the movement’s anti-sectism more than its Christ and thus they could not comprehend the practicality of Warner’s idealism regarding being free from all “isms”—no

---

<sup>23</sup>D. S. Warner, *No-Sectism* (Moundsville, W. Va.: Gospel Trumpet Company, n.d.), 11-12.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-6.

matter how desirable that might be. Sims argued that the protection of the rights of individual Christians demands that there be a visible organization, and hence sects. Further, in an editorial in *The Earnest Christian*, B. T. Roberts, while arguing that church organization is essential for the orderly protection of the rights and privileges of Christians, made reference to an editorial in the *Gospel Trumpet* that Roberts described as “the name of an organ of the sect no-sect.”<sup>26</sup> This editorial apparently discussed two evangelists that were being exposed for earning their livings “under a hypocritical holiness garb.” Roberts admits that he is unaware of the true facts in the case being discussed, but challenges the right of the editor to condemn fellow Christians in such a manner. Even if they were guilty,

. . . what right has the editor to try, condemn and execute those parties, without citing them to trial and giving them a chance to be heard in their own defense? Are they under his authority? Who placed them there? . . . Are the professed children of God to be governed by lynch law? Yet under the no-sect theory no other government is possible.<sup>27</sup>

Bishop Sims concluded his argument with the contention characteristic of most Free Methodists both then and now:

It is utterly impossible for them—such as come out of sects—to prove that they are not a sect. . . . Are there any Christians in the world besides yourself, and those with whom you are associated? Then you are a sect.<sup>28</sup>

D. S. Warner responded by insisting that it is simply deception to insist either that the organization of sects is essential to the visibility of God’s church or that the church cannot be organized for its mission without the emergence of sects.<sup>29</sup>

From the Free Methodist side, little else can be documented which states opinions of and reactions to the Church of God movement as such. Sims and Roberts apparently said what they felt needed to be said. But the movement was certainly not through with its critique of Free Methodism! Continued criticism of the Free Methodist Church in particular and of sectism in general was grounded in this affirmation:

<sup>26</sup>Editorial, *The Earnest Christian*, XLII:5 (May, 1882), 160.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Warner, *No-Sectism*, 33.

<sup>29</sup>Warner, *No-Sectism*, 33.

This gathering of God's people out of sect Babylon back to Zion [the movement seeing itself as one example of a spontaneous and widespread moving of God upon His divided people everywhere], into one fold, was foretold by the prophets. . . . What are God's people who are yet scattered there commanded to do? What saith the Scripture? "From such withdraw thyself: from such turn away." No honest soul can remain there after hearing this solemn command.<sup>30</sup>

W. H. Cheatham's declared in the *Gospel Trumpet* that the Devil often counterfeits the true church.

And after the dark age and reign of this Roman beast, we can see traces of the true church appearing again. As she advances in the true light (word of God), the devil brings forth his churches, and his Bible, which is this discipline, creeds, etc. . . . So about the year 1861 he brought forth one they called Free Methodist. The devil, no doubt, thought that this young daughter of the beast family would palm off for the genuine church; but soon the detector was laid on her and she was found wanting.<sup>31</sup>

W. A. Haynes, in an article in the *Gospel Trumpet* entitled "A New God," tried to discredit Free Methodism by being "creative" in his quoting of an article by George Fitch in which Fitch had tried to set forth the origin and doctrines of his denomination. Quotes Hayes (and the internal parentheses are his additions):

In the Genesee conference of the M. E. church, about the year 1858, several preachers and many members were excluded from the church (M. E. sect) for their adherence to the principles of Methodism (not God's word), especially to the doctrine and experience of "entire sanctification." Appeals were made to the general conference (instead of God) which were denied. . . . Therefore, they (not Christ) felt compelled (because of their ignorance of God's word) to form a new (dis)organization. . . . The Free Methodist church was organized by a convention of laymen and ministers which met at Pekin, Niagara County, New York, on the twenty-third day of August, 1860.

---

<sup>30</sup>Daniel Warner and Herbert Riggle, *The Cleansing of the Sanctuary* (Moundsville, W. Va.: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1903), 395-396.

<sup>31</sup>W. H. Cheatham, "Beware of Counterfeits," *Gospel Trumpet* (May 16, 1895), 4.

At this point Hayes interrupts his own quoting to explain:

Christ said in A. D. 32 he would build his church. . . . How is this, this heavenly church, compared to F. M.-ism which was not thought of until eighteen hundred and twenty seven years after Christ completed his organization? . . . Oh what contrast! And, my dear reader, will you take warning and flee from sect confusion to the church of the living God?

Hayne's quoting of Fitch is resumed:

All hope of obtaining anything like justice was cut off. What could be done? To stay in the M. E. church was impossible. We had not left. We were unjustly and cruelly turned out. To what other church could we go and find a home?

Haynes then bursts in—

Oh, ye poor victims of tyranny, you were without a home, you were away from Father's house, and not acquainted with our mother. Galatians 4:26. You knew no church where "you would be welcome." Then you were outside the church of the first-born, and did not know where to look for it. Why did you not repent of your ungodliness? Then Jesus would have let you *in his church*. But you did not think of him, did not know he had a church. . . . You ran from a lion and a bear caught you. . . .<sup>32</sup>

By the 1890s it had become common for Church of God leaders to read church history as a pattern of apostasy led (according to a reading of the Book of Revelation) by the "Beast" (Roman Catholicism) and the "Second Beast" (Rome's many sectish Protestant daughters). Speaking of the Wesleyan reform of the eighteenth century, for instance, Herbert Riggle reported this in 1912:

After a great body was thus called out, they became deceived because God was specially favoring them, and organized into a sect . . . an image to the old, or papal, beast. As soon as they did this, they lost their spirituality, and today they are a dead, formal body. The very doctrine with which Wesley started his reform is today rejected by a large number of the Methodist

---

<sup>32</sup>W. A. Haynes (Flag Springs, Mo.), "A New God," *Gospel Trumpet* (March 21, 1895), 1.

divines. A number of years ago B. T. Roberts and several other Methodist ministers began to preach holiness, and the result was an excommunication. These preachers then began to shout, “We are free! We are free!” But not willing to give up the name Methodists, they organized an image that they term “Free Methodists.” These people are now as dead spiritually as their mother. Their work is accompanied by much noise but little power of God. So it has been throughout the entire Protestant age.<sup>33</sup>

Riggle and his Church of God colleagues understood themselves to be part of God’s rising above “the entire Protestant age” in the “evening light” time of the church. They were privileged to be in the vanguard of the “final reformation” of the church.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the several similarities between the Free Methodist Church and the Church of God movement (and there are more similarities than the differences being emphasized here in their most extreme forms),<sup>35</sup> there obviously was considerable friction between them a century ago. The major source of this friction seems to have been that they were both engaged in spiritual warfare, although they were not always fighting the same foes. Free Methodism was challenging “world-worship” within the churches, and the Church of God movement, in addition to opposing worldliness, was directing substantial energies toward a reformation *of the churches themselves*—“sect-worship.” These differing orientations made it exceedingly difficult for each to adequately appreciate the contribution of the other. Free Methodism, while recognizing the danger of severe self-orientation, saw the Church of God as offering no satisfactory alternative to some organized form of “sectism.” The Church of God, on the other hand, seems to have pictured “F.M.-ism” as the hapless defender of the Maginot

---

<sup>33</sup>Herbert M. Riggle, *The Christian Church: Its Rise and Progress* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1912), 190. Reprinted 1997 by Reformation Publishers, Clarksville, TN.

<sup>34</sup>See F. G. Smith, *The Last Reformation* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1919).

<sup>35</sup>Not only are these similarities seen in basic doctrinal and aesthetic-prudential standards, especially in the decades being considered above, but one even sees like terminology and concepts of evangelism when comparing such volumes as H. M. Riggle, *Pioneer Evangelism* (the 1924 recollections of an early Church of God movement evangelist) and J. W. Sigsworth, *The Battle Was the Lord’s* (a history of the Free Methodist Church in Canada).



Line against worldliness while the hoards of sectism were striking and smashing from the undefended rear.

One can understand why Free Methodism was unable to appreciate another “holiness” group that was determined to associate “entire sanctification” with a vision of church unity that Free Methodists judged impractical and not worthy of propagation. At the same time, one finds it difficult to discredit *a priori* the insistence of the Church of God that Christians acquainted with the “deeper life” should pause to reconsider the divinely inspired implications that ought to follow on a *corporate level* the individual’s being graciously renewed by the presence and power of the Spirit of God. In an atmosphere of clashing rhetoric where the spirit of reconciliation had not yet appeared, mutual appreciation was unlikely.

Whatever one’s final judgment in this regard, at least one thing appears certain. The sometimes harsh and blunt polemical language sampled above is more understandable when placed in the context of the times in which it was employed. Further, if the testimonies of the early pioneers of the Church of God movement are accepted at face value (and evidence generally indicates that they should be thus taken), then the ethics involved in calling Christians out of denominationalism into God’s only, divinely-organized church is above question. They did *not* issue a call for others to come and join a new sect, even a “no-sect” sect, whether or not these pioneers soon were drawn subtly into a sect pattern in order to consolidate their gains and propagate their message. The initial call was for God’s people, scattered and stunted by many human barriers, to free themselves of all such bondages so that they might enter into *a fellowship of the whole of God’s people*. These pioneers were vibrating with a vision and were on the march, not for themselves, but for God on behalf of God’s people, “in order that the world may know.” No less than a frank recognition of this ideal does justice to the vision of the reformation movement of the Church of God.

### **Changing Attitudes and Retrospective Wisdom**

By 1900 Henry Wickersham, an early church historian in the ranks of the Church of God movement, signaled a softening of the previous pattern of harsh anti-sectarian rhetoric. He reported that “the Free Methodist sect, though small compared to the Methodist Episcopal Church, has considerable zeal and demonstration of power, and does considerable evangelistic

work.”<sup>36</sup> H. M. Riggle, after his famous days of public debating on behalf of his religious views, came to this fresh conclusion in 1924:

Personally, I question the wisdom of Christian ministers making it a business publicly to discuss points of theological difference. In the past, when certain religious cults emphasized their distinctive doctrines, public debates were common. A Disciple minister once told me that as soon as his converts were immersed they came out of the water “ready for dispute.” But this spirit of controversy is rapidly disappearing and God-fearing men everywhere are rising above their petty differences and seeking a common ground where all can work together in evangelizing the world.<sup>37</sup>

In this more congenial spirit, Riggle almost affectionately tells an amusing incident recalled from those early years of tension between the Church of God movement and the Free Methodist Church.

Two Free Methodist preachers with whom I am well acquainted were holding meetings in Greensburg, PA. In a special service a man was seeking holiness. Their method emphasizes dying out to sin. The seeker at the altar became desperate and cried at the top of his voice, “Kill him, kill him, Lord.” A man on the street heard this and supposed that a murder was being committed. He ran and rang the police alarm, and soon the place of meeting was full of officers in blue coats ready to arrest the murderers, who proved to be harmless holiness preachers.<sup>38</sup>

Charles E. Brown, a prominent editor, theologian, and historian in the Church of God movement, indicated in 1966 that “it is almost unbelievable the hostility we [Church of God Movement] had toward other church groups in the early days—even with the holiness people.”<sup>39</sup> But time has

---

<sup>36</sup>Henry C. Wickersham, *A History of the Church* (Moundsville, W. Va.: 1900), 263.

<sup>37</sup>H. M. Riggle, *Pioneer Evangelism* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Publishing Company, 1924), 116. Note that Riggle, one of the more forceful of the early evangelists of the Church of God movement, saw no compromise involved in open cooperation with other Christians who differed with him. This is one key aspect of the unity ideal.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>39</sup>Charles E. Brown, in David Telfer, “Interdenominational Cooperation in the Church of God,” Anderson School of Theology (unpublished, March 30, 1966).

properly lessened the emotional atmosphere so that the Spirit of Christ can more easily guide former “contestants” into becoming present and future “companions” in the quest for the whole truth of God as it is in Jesus Christ. This new atmosphere of increased objectivity has permitted one to understand better the tension-filled relationship of these two church groups in earlier generations. There was the unbounded and unrelenting, even awkward and impractical, vigor of a unity ideal in its youth clashing with a force occupied largely in other concerns and generally unimpressed with what it considered dramatic pronouncements and restorationist fancies. Now there is more humility arising from an increased historical consciousness. In a common statement made by leaders of the Church of God movement and the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ in 1996 after nearly a decade of intense conversation about these similar yet differing church traditions, there is this: “We have learned that the roles played by the Enlightenment [for the Christian Churches] and American Holiness/Revivalism [for the Church of God] have shaped the theological perspectives of our respective heritages. This awareness now influences our attitude and helps us to transcend certain limitations coming from our histories.”<sup>40</sup>

James Earl Massey wrote *Concerning Christian Unity* in 1979 and through it offered many Church of God people a fresh way of viewing this crucial subject. He repeated the classic concern of this movement that “membership in denominational families has made Christian believers far more conscious of separate traditions than of the true nature of the Church.” However, he conceded this: “Although the Church is a spiritual fellowship in which Christ is the central and uniting figure, we all experience that fellowship in connection with some denominational or denominated group.” Denominations are “mainly patterns of partnership in which believers have tended to cluster. . . . No one group is the complete historical embodiment of the Church as Jesus planned it, even if its emphasis is more nearly apostolic or embraces a greater area of the original teachings that undergird the Church.” Even so, since “denominational separatism limits fellowship and hinders having a visible unity,” and since “every Christian has a legacy in every other Christian,” “we experience that legacy only as we receive each other and relate, moving eagerly beyond group

---

<sup>40</sup>The full statement is found in Barry Callen and James North, *Coming Together In Christ: Pioneering a New Testament Way To Christian Unity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997), Appendix I.

boundaries.” Unity is “one of the Lord’s imperatives for his people.” In a study of Ephesians 4, Massey concludes that Christian unity is a given, “but our experience of it must be gained.”

Such intentional gaining of functional unity has become part of the newer perspective of the Church of God movement. In 1984 the Church of God in North America convened a “Consultation on Mission and Ministry” to establish goals for the movement to the end of the twentieth century. One stated goal established was “to expand ministries through voluntary relationships with Christian groups outside the Church of God Reformation Movement and to seek to live out the vision of unity through broader interdependent relationships that serve mutual needs for training, fellowship, and witness.” It was in this spirit of fresh openness that in 1984 Dr. Gilbert Stafford began representing the Commission on Christian Unity of the Church of God in meetings of the Faith and Order Movement. He explained in 1997 his view of the importance of such representation and called for wider involvement by Holiness churches in ecumenical exchanges.<sup>41</sup> The following year David Cubie wrote about a Wesleyan perspective on Christian unity, observing: “A principle that has largely been lost by the present holiness denominations, except for the Church of God (Anderson), is that the unity of the church is an essential part of eschatological hope.”<sup>42</sup>

In 1987 the officers of the General Assembly of the Church of God invited the late Bishop Clyde Van Valin of the Free Methodist Church to function as an observer in its annual sessions and then address the Assembly with his honest evaluative comments. He said to the Assembly that the Church of God movement’s focus on Christian unity is “a message that we all need to hear expounded and demonstrated.”<sup>43</sup> For the June 2000 General Assembly, a similar observer invitation was accepted by a former Free Methodist leader, Dr. Kevin Mannoia, who at the time was President of the National Association of Evangelicals. In the 1990s the Free Methodist Church convened two of its General Conferences on the campus

---

<sup>41</sup>Gilbert W. Stafford, “Faith and Order: Holiness Church Participation,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32:1 (Spring 1997), 143-156.

<sup>42</sup>David L. Cubie, “A Wesleyan Perspective on Christian Unity,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 33:2 (Fall 1998), 227.

<sup>43</sup>For a record of the comments of Bishop VanValin and other observers over the years, see the documentary history of the Church of God (Anderson) by Barry L. Callen, compiler and editor, *Following the Light* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2000), 323-326.

of Anderson University (1995 and 1999), which is the largest of the institutions of higher education of the Church of God movement and is located adjacent to the general offices of the movement's North American cooperative ministries. The hosting relationship was congenial indeed. At the 1995 General Conference, Barry L. Callen of the Church of God served by invitation on the four-person Findings Committee that observed the Conference at close range and prepared an analysis of it for the Board of Bishops. The Committee was comprised of three prominent Free Methodists, was chaired by Dr. David McKenna, and included Dr. Barry Callen as an "outside" observer-analyst. There have been several other joint relationships of various kinds, including cooperation in publishing the "Aldersgate" church curriculum and the fact that a recent General Director of Church of God Ministries (North America), Robert Pearson, received his undergraduate education on a Free Methodist campus (Seattle Pacific University).

One "ecumenical" activity of each of these holiness bodies in recent decades is worth noting because of the differing goals that reflect a continuing difference of ecumenical vision still held. From 1907 to 1919 there had been an unsuccessful set of conversations about church union between the Free Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Then from 1943 to 1955 such conversations were revived in the hope of creating a new holiness denomination, the United Wesleyan Methodist Church. Even though a detailed draft of a proposed new *Discipline* was completed for the new denomination and the 1955 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church was highly affirmative, the Wesleyan General Conference defeated the union process by a 96-62 negative vote. This attempt at increased unity had proceeded along organizational lines—how to blend church structures and agree officially on the wording of beliefs and practices. The thought was that a congenial merger would have enhanced the unity among the involved Christians. After considerable effort, it was not to be.

By contrast, for a period of years beginning in the late 1980s, Church of God (Anderson) leaders engaged in serious "ecumenical" dialogue with leaders of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ of the Campbellite or Disciples tradition. Neither of these bodies is "connectional" organizationally and neither thinks of enhancing Christian unity primarily along organizational lines. Neither has anything like a *Discipline* and neither would want one, let alone trying to negotiate a common one. One is not a "holi-

ness” body and both were anxious to make clear that “merger” was never a consideration (a concept at odds with the nature of the strong Christian unity traditions of both groups). Their vigorous unity visions are fellowship and Christian-identity oriented in ways leading away from organizational approaches to Christian unity. A book growing out of these conversations is titled *Coming Together In Christ* and was co-authored by a representative of each dialogue partner.<sup>44</sup> *Unity in Christ* is a concept compatible with both groups, as opposed to unity in formalized doctrine or church organization. What came from this effort was not a failed legislative vote, but warm Christian friendships, better self-understandings, and a series of cooperative ministry and mission efforts that would not have happened otherwise.

Currently appearing on the web site of the Free Methodist Church are ten defining values of that denomination. Here are two of them:

**Connectional:** We are a church which recognizes and values its nature as a connectional church united with others in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and not possessing an independent mind set.

**Movement:** We are a church which aggressively seeks to make Him [Jesus Christ] known by putting mission above self-preservation and status quo and are not concerned primarily with our own existence, comfort or organizational operations.

The “movement” designation and most of its Free Methodist description reflects well the Church of God heritage.<sup>45</sup> The only exception is the “church” self-designation. The Church of God has emphasized the concept of “movement” to the point of avoiding any claimed “church” identity for itself—such identity being seen as the institutional demise of a true movement. The Church of God admittedly has struggled with an “independent mind set” that is not countered, as it is for Free Methodists, by the “connectional value.” It aspires to increased and mutual accountability, but con-

---

<sup>44</sup>For a detailed account of this extended ecumenical conversation, see Barry Callen and James North, *Coming Together In Christ: Pioneering a New Testament Way To Christian Unity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup>The new “Membership and Covenant” adopted by the 1995 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church was intended to equate as closely as possible the New Testament model of entrance into the church (Body of Christ) with requirements for membership in the denomination. This intention is very compatible with the ecumenical vision of the Church of God tradition.

tinues to resist any formal “connectionalism” that creates a network of “ecclesiastical control” that, it is thought, usually moves quickly to *human* domination of *God’s* church. Both of these holiness bodies value the “free” word and agree on it as an appropriate adjective for most aspects of church life. Both of these holiness bodies are seeking a better balance between *form* and *freedom*. The Free Methodist Church carries an episcopal heritage and seeks increased flexibility in the midst of structured accountability; the Church of God carries a free-church heritage and seeks more structured accountability without violating the heritage of freedom in the Spirit of Christ.

These quests continue, now in a spirit of constructive cooperation rather than in the older spirit of rhetoric-laden critique. The Church of God now talks about putting the “move” back into the Movement while Doug Newton, coordinator of the 1999 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church (that convened on the Anderson University campus of the Church of God) began this way his February 27, 1998, letter to Free Methodist pastors:

The question is being asked across the Free Methodist Church, “Can a movement be restarted?” No one doubts that the early days of the Free Methodist denomination qualified as a bona fide movement of God. All of the characteristics were present. Energy. Enthusiasm. Fruitfulness. Creativity. Expansion. Progress. Strong identity. Passionate focus. There’s a unanimous desire across the North American church to be part of a movement again. But can it happen?

This is a crucial question. The answer is yet to be seen, but at least it is being asked seriously and simultaneously by *both* the Church of God Movement and the Free Methodist Church.

Two holiness bodies have been on differing ecumenical journeys. At first the contrast between them was sharply drawn. Now, with each body much changed, the considerable congruities between them are most prominent. Reconciliation has been in the wind for decades and surely will proceed.

# A WESLEYAN MODEL FOR RECONCILIATION AND EVANGELISM? CONVERSATION WITH HEGEL AND LÉVINAS

by

**Christina M. Gschwandtner**

What could be a Wesleyan way of living out a reconciling mission? Where should we seek Wesleyan models for evangelism or missions? The answers we receive from John Wesley himself are ambiguous. In fact, two seemingly contradictory stances can easily be located in Wesley by examining a few of his sermons.

On the one hand, Wesley can conceive of literally anyone as a partner in the reconciling mission of calling people to change their lives and enter upon a holy path. He acknowledges God at work not only in Methodists who disagree with him, not only in other Protestants (be they Lutheran or even Calvinist), not only in other Christian traditions (in “a papist, an Arian, a Socinian”), but even in non-Christians (or, as he puts it, in “a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk”).<sup>1</sup> If any such people “cast out devils” and thus change people’s lives, they deserve full support. Not only are they not to be hindered, but we are to acknowledge God’s hand at work in them, praise their work with rejoicing and thanksgiving, encourage them, speak well of them, enlarge their sphere of action, show them kindness, and pray for them.<sup>2</sup> Whoever refrains from doing any of this, Wesley calls a

---

<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1996), 491.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



bigot.<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the context that he does not expect this other person, whose activities we are to support with all our strength, to be in any manner or form “Christian” (or “Wesleyan”) or to be promoting any particular version of Christianity.

Similarly, in his famous sermon on the “Catholic Spirit,” Wesley accounts differences of opinion, worship, and even important doctrinal issues as of little significance in how we approach and treat another person.<sup>4</sup> He summarizes his argument:

I dare not, therefore, presume to impose my mode of worship on any other. I believe it is truly primitive and apostolical: But my belief is no rule for another. I ask not, therefore, of him with whom I would unite in love, Are you of my church? of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of Church government, and allow the same Church officers, with me? Do you join in the same form of prayer wherein I worship God? I inquire not, Do you receive the supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner that I do? nor whether, in the administration of baptism, you agree with me. . . . Nay, I ask not of you . . . whether you allow baptism and the Lord’s supper at all. Let all these things stand by; we will talk of them, if need be, at a more convenient season; my only question at present is this,—“Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?”<sup>5</sup>

Although Wesley admonishes us to be fully convinced of our own stances in these matters, we should not impose them on others, but let our encounters be defined by love and prayer.<sup>6</sup> This appears indeed an attitude astonishingly open toward others and their differences.

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Wesley defines bigotry as “too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, Church and religion. Therefore he is a bigot who is so fond of any of these, so strongly attached to them, as to forbid any who casts out devils because he differs from himself in any or all of these particulars” (ibid., 490). Departing from Mark 9:38-39, he uses “casting out devils” in this sermon as an expression referring to changing another person for the better, inducing them to turn from sin and to live a holy life.

<sup>4</sup>Idem, “Catholic Spirit,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 492-504.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 496-97.

<sup>6</sup>Wesley says, for example, “while he [a catholic spirit] is steadily fixed in his religious principles, in what he believes to be truth as it is in Jesus; while he firmly adheres to that worship of God which he judges to be most acceptable in his sight; and while he is united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular

On the other hand, one can find in Wesley statements almost diametrically opposed. He describes “heathens” as “inferior to beasts in the field,” as “more savage than lions.”<sup>7</sup> Muslims, whom he considers “a little, and but a little, above the Heathens in religion,” he depicts as miserably deluded; as animals who are “as void of mercy as lions and tigers; as much given up to brutal lusts as bulls or goats . . . in truth a disgrace to human nature, and a plague. . . .”<sup>8</sup> He accuses a woman writer who presents a positive picture of Ethiopians, as attempting to “wash them white” and discounts her eyewitness account, implying that she probably had improper sexual relations with them to obtain her biased tale.<sup>9</sup> Christian groups living in Muslim areas, he is convinced, are of “deplorable ignorance” and of “total, stupid, barbarous irreligion.”<sup>10</sup> In the same breath he condemns Roman Catholics and most Protestant traditions who, although “pre-eminent” because they are Western European, are still as far from true religion “as hell is from heaven.”<sup>11</sup> He goes on to outline a plan to turn the whole world into a harbor of heart-holiness. This true religion, he claims, has begun in Oxford, infiltrated all of England, and will now move to Europe and finally to Asia, Africa, and America.<sup>12</sup>

---

congregation—his heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he knows not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection, neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic or universal love. And he that has this is of a catholic spirit. For love alone gives the title to this character: Catholic love is a catholic spirit” (ibid., 503).

<sup>7</sup>Idem, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 279. He claims of the “natural religion” of all Indians that it is “to torture all their prisoners from morning till night, till at length they roast them to death; and, upon the slightest undesigned provocation to come behind and shoot any of their own countrymen! Yea, it is a common thing among them, for the son, if he thinks his father lives too long, to knock out his brains; and for a mother, if she is tired of her children, to fasten stones about their necks, and throw three or four of them into the river, one after another!” (“Caution against Bigotry,” 482).

<sup>8</sup>Idem, “Spread of the Gospel,” 279.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 281-283. Does not a similar procedure often implicitly characterize many present-day movements of Christian missions and evangelism? Not only have missionary endeavors often consisted in a conscious or unconscious spread of Western attitudes, habits, political convictions, and cultural idiosyncrasies, but the very attempt to “evangelize” or to establish missionary work usually assumes that the other is essentially the same or similar to us and thus must comprehend the

What are we to do with these two apparently contradictory stances? Are we to agree with the Wesley who admonishes us against bigotry or the one who displays it himself? Which Wesley are we to follow? And why are we to side with one over the other? Although he considered philosophers the least likely to be converted,<sup>13</sup> maybe the use of precisely two philosophers could help to introduce another perspective into this puzzling dichotomy in Wesley. Maybe observing two very different models for reconciliation and treatments of “otherness” will point to possibilities for finding and supporting a Wesleyan approach to reconciliation and evangelism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hegel: Reconciliation and Unity**

The “master of reconciliation” in the history of philosophy is, of course, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Reconciliation is for Hegel the fundamental term and characteristic of the truth of philosophy and the movement of the Spirit of all that was, is, and will be. The dialectic that is reflected in and enables Hegel’s system of philosophy is driven by and possible only through reconciliation. Reconciliation is the power that unites, illuminates, and brings forth truth. What, then, does reconciliation mean for Hegel?

---

message of salvation in the way in which we understand it. The other is saved from past, culture, particularity, difference, and is assimilated into the truth of a usually very North American or Western European Christianity. The other is properly Christian, properly reconciled, when all difference is erased and the truth has been accepted as one and universal. Christian faith often lacks any significant recognition of the individuality and difference of the other. This leads to a reduction of the Christian faith, not to its enrichment. To describe unity as “sameness” where all have been made alike and agree on most important points appears not faithful to the Triune pattern for unity that Christ articulates in John 17, nor to preserve the kenotic nature of the reconciliation that characterizes the incarnation. Hopefully the two philosophical models for reconciliation which are examined in this paper can enlighten our thinking on this topic—both to highlight what might be amiss in our definitions of reconciliation and how we might find better ways to formulate and practice it.

<sup>13</sup>Wesley, “Spread of the Gospel,” 283. He says: “Last of all, the wise and learned, the men of genius, the philosophers, will be convinced that they are fools; will be ‘converted and become as little children,’ and ‘enter into the kingdom of God.’ ”

<sup>14</sup>In this paper, I am speaking of “reconciliation” specifically in the context of the first encounter of another person, as is usually presupposed in most evangelism and missions efforts. I am not dealing with reconciliation in terms of “forgiveness” or the re-establishing of a broken relationship in personal encounters.

Although one usually thinks of Hegel in static, totalizing, and very unifying terms, he actually places great emphasis on the importance of difference and otherness. Reconciliation is not possible if one has not thoroughly recognized the otherness and contrariness of the antithesis or the opposing force. As Quentin Lauer highlights, for Hegel “any insistence on one position to the exclusion of its opposite not only risks falsification; it is false by virtue of its very oneness. Not only can insistence on what is itself good *lead to* evil consequences; it is itself evil if the insistence is one-sided.”<sup>15</sup> The other must be truly different and recognized as such before the movement of reconciliation can take place. Only in retrospect does the philosopher recognize that what seemed utterly different and contradictory could in fact also be seen as merely a different aspect of the same.

Hegel also takes thorough account of the complexity of phenomena and of reality. His system is not a generic harmonizing movement that ignores particularities, but a highly sophisticated treatment of differences that he does not regard as merely superficial. Otherness is necessary and essential for the movement of Spirit and in fact for any kind of progress or movement.<sup>16</sup> The continual danger in the *Phenomenology* is that the investigating mind might be satisfied with its present state, rest in itself, and not perceive any uncomfortable differences or contradictions that would aid to prod it further. The system is not static but in continual movement outside and beyond itself.<sup>17</sup>

The movement of reconciliation takes place because the mind cannot rest in either thesis or antithesis. Neither are satisfying because they contradict each other and make it impossible to rest on one side only. A synthesis must be found that reconciles the two opposing movements, forces,

---

<sup>15</sup>Quentin Lauer, S.J., *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York, Fordham University Press, 1976), 85; emphasis his.

<sup>16</sup>“But not the life that shrinks back before death or seeks to guard itself clear of destruction, but that which bears it and sustains itself within it, is the life of the Spirit. It gains its truth only by finding itself in the absolute ‘torn-ness’ [*Zerissenheit*]. It is this power not in the positive which looks away from the negative, as we say of things: ‘This is no good or false. Well, that’s it. Let’s move on to something else’; but it is this power only by facing the negative, by lingering with it. This lingering is the magic power which turns it into Being” (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Werke 3* [Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1993]), 36). All translations from languages other than English are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>17</sup>*Phänomenologie*, 18.

or states of mind. This synthesis, however, cannot merely replace the two sides, ignore them, or annihilate them. It must sublimate and incorporate the two differences, “pick them up” (literal meaning of *aufheben*) and lift them higher, carry them further. Reconciliation does not deny one or the other, but uses both for a higher and better third that simultaneously preserves the essential truth of both by incorporating them into itself. Yet, the movement of reconciliation does not stop there. It continually moves further, prods the investigating mind to explore new truths, to develop itself more thoroughly, to recognize its own inconsistencies and thus to become more real and more true itself. As Lauer explains, “Opposition is reconciled where the complementarity of opposed moments is recognized, such that they become moments of the one process which is the whole, the truth. This, after all, is what ‘reason’ is about, the process of reconciliation which is not confined to the activity of a thinking subject over against a non-thinking world.”<sup>18</sup>

One example of this reconciling dialectic is Hegel’s analysis of the Trinity in the stage of revealed Spirit or religion, the next to last stage of his movement of the Spirit (and indeed his whole system as elaborated in the *Encyclopedia*). Hegel considers the formulation of the Trinity the highest achievement and pinnacle of religious thought. It encapsulates and presents the movement of the entire system and its goal, although it does not yet do so with the same self-conscious awareness as the reflection of philosophy in the following (and final) step. In religion, absolute Spirit manifests itself and is no longer abstract.<sup>19</sup>

In his Triune identity,<sup>20</sup> God first exhibits his own eternal content, remaining and reposing in himself in the very movement of manifestation (Father). In the incarnation, he reveals himself in difference, in his entry into the world, thus positing a difference between the eternal being and its concrete manifestation in the world (Son). Finally, this movement also comprises the eternal return and reconciliation of the world with the eternal being, the return of the revelation to the unity of its fullness (Spirit).<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Lauer, *Hegel*, 278.

<sup>19</sup>Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, in *Werke 10* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1970), 373.

<sup>20</sup>Both Hegel and Lévinas consistently use the male pronoun for God. For practical purposes I will do the same in representing their thought, although I recognize the problematic nature of such terminology.

<sup>21</sup>*Enzyklopädie*, 375.

The Father-Creator generates or sends forth the Son who is distinct and different. Yet in so doing, in a sense, God produces himself as himself. According to Lauer, “that God as Father ‘generates’ a Son Hegel sees as a ‘representational’ way of saying that in knowing himself God has ‘othered’ himself and thus knows himself in another, and that this knowing himself in another is a return to himself.”<sup>22</sup> Between Son and Father exist both distinctiveness and identity. Their difference is eternally sublimated, picked up, mediated by the concrete singularity and subjectivity of the Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit are truly and eternally different and yet simultaneously mere self-expression of the one whole. The Spirit is the connection between Father and Son and yet a concrete, individual person. Obviously, there is no way in which the Spirit can be said to annihilate Father and Son by this “synthesis.” Their unity and their difference are instead highlighted and eternally preserved by the Spirit and by the relationship between the three persons.<sup>23</sup>

In the movement of the incarnation, the Son, the God-Man, becomes fully human and in this motion renders the abstract God (the absolute, eternal Being) self-conscious. Spirit,<sup>24</sup> therefore, becomes self-conscious Spirit for the first time in the *Phenomenology* (and thus accomplishes the identity of substance and subject which Hegel set out to unify from the very beginning). The incarnation can be said to be a necessary step in God’s self-development.<sup>25</sup> Yet, not only does God as “other” become conscious of himself and his immanence, but humanity must also become conscious of its divinity. We receive a first glimpse of this in the movement of reconciliation among people (humans are most divine when they forgive one another)<sup>26</sup> and more generally by the Spirit’s self-revelation and incorporation in

---

<sup>22</sup>Lauer, *Hegel*, 250.

<sup>23</sup>Hegel defines the Trinity even more explicitly: “In the moment of *generality*, the sphere of the pure *thought* or the abstract element of *essential* being, it is thus the absolute Spirit who is first that which is *presupposed*, yet not as that which remains locked away, but is *Creator* of heaven and earth as a *substantial power* in the reflective designation of the causality, but also produces only *himself* as his *Son* in the eternal sphere; furthermore remains in ordinary identity with this distinct one; as the designation, to be that which differs from general essential being, picks itself up eternally. And only through this mediation in this itself-sublimating mediation, is the first substance, essentially as *concrete singularity* and subjectivity—the *Spirit*.” *Enzyklopädie*, 375. Emphasis his.

<sup>24</sup>*Phänomenologie*, 571.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 553.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 493f.

and of the church. Humans live their divinity and “spirituality” in the community of the church (*Gemeine der Gemeinde*). This movement is not yet complete, however, because the believing person is not yet fully conscious of this divine reality. Reconciliation has *already* happened, but for Christian faith the fulfillment of that redemption is still in the future, is *not yet*. Reconciliation is already present in Christ by faith, but simultaneously still awaited for the world. The consciousness of the community/ church (*Gemeinde*) is still split.<sup>27</sup> Thus, a further stage is necessary in Hegel’s system, the stage of philosophy, where absolute Spirit is fully conscious of its own immanence.<sup>28</sup> In this last stage we come to realize that for Hegel, ultimately, reconciliation achieves unity, harmony, and wholeness by equating the world and God. Transcendence is excluded in Hegel’s system by transforming it into immanence. In the kenotic movement, Hegel’s God/Spirit becomes self-conscious by merging with the evil of the world while simultaneously realizing that it was already contained within him-/itself.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the parallel human movement is one that becomes conscious of itself as totality. God and human are in the end mere expressions or aspects of each other. The Spirit has reconciled all in all within itself.

Although Hegel’s account indeed recognizes the importance of difference, otherness is thus finally, in retrospect, always merely an aspect of the same, part of the one unifying movement. Although he continually affirms the openendedness of his system, this affirmation does not seem thoroughly convincing in light of the intensely totalizing movement and all-inclusive sweep of the continually progressing Spirit. In the end, the entire movement is somehow pre-determined and cannot be otherwise, in spite of all Hegel’s protestations to the contrary. Although he presents the investigation of the *Phenomenology* as one utterly open and without any pre-determined goal, it is simultaneously always understood that the investigating mind will take this path, that it is the only coherent, logical, or possible one.<sup>30</sup> The growth of the entire movement is already contained in its bulb. All differences of the world are, in one sense or another, aspects of

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 574.

<sup>28</sup>For an elaboration of this insufficiency of religion, see the last paragraph of Hegel’s treatment of religion in the *Phenomenology* (ibid., 574).

<sup>29</sup>*Phänomenologie*, 566.

<sup>30</sup>Thus, he asserts, for example, in his preface: “It is the becoming of itself, the circle which presupposes its own end as its purpose and has it as beginning and is only real through its performance/completion and its end” (ibid., 23).

the same universal Spirit that manifests itself in and through them.<sup>31</sup> Reconciliation becomes a movement that harmonizes and totalizes, that preserves difference only by continually affirming its identity and unity.<sup>32</sup> Love becomes the religious reason to regard “otherness” not as “difference” but as “sameness.”<sup>33</sup> Otherness is necessary not as such but in order to find oneself.<sup>34</sup> Hegel’s account, then, reveals itself as rather totalitarian. Everything is subject to his system, incorporated in it, consumed by it. For all his emphasis on the importance of difference, Hegel’s view of reconciliation is finally one of unity and sameness. It is true, multiplicity and distinctiveness are not excluded, but they are included to such an extent that they are deprived of their distinctive character. To the inquiring mind, all apparent differences merge into one harmonious whole. For Hegel, “reconciliation” means “making the same,” integrating and unifying into this overall Truth or harmony.

Without meaning to imply that the church has ever on any level attempted to be “Hegelian” or to incorporate a Hegelian model for evangelism, it seems that a similar concept of reconciliation is often at work in our efforts of evangelism, missions, and church growth projects. Is not the assumption that the others whom we encounter need to hear and respond to the message of salvation in the same way that we have done? Do we not often impose our particular views and convictions on others, implying that they must become like us to be truly “Christian”? Do we not conceive of the goal of evangelism as one of unity and harmony where only very peripheral differences are permissible? Maybe the starkness of the Hegelian implications of such a totalizing view of reconciliation can admonish against the dangers of a similar harmonizing approach to missions and evangelism that denies another person’s otherness and attempts to assimilate them into our versions of what is right and acceptable. Maybe realizing that unity and har-

---

<sup>31</sup>Hegel claims, “For the Spirit is the knowing of itself in its self-emptying; the essential being which is the movement, to guard in its otherness its sameness with itself” (*Phänomenologie*, 552). See also the explication somewhat further on the same page.

<sup>32</sup>It would be interesting to examine the relationships between this account of reconciliation and Hegel’s negative account of other races and nationalities in such writings as the *Philosophy of Right* or his lectures on the philosophy of history. It does seem that a treatment that discounts otherness and transcendence in general is quick to exclude “otherness” in human relationships as well.

<sup>33</sup>*Phänomenologie*, 561.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 562.



mony are problematic in philosophical thought on reconciliation and often lead to totalitarian consequences will make us more weary of similar emphases in our theological thinking of reconciliation.

Are not Wesleyans to some extent especially susceptible to such “harmonizing” attitudes because of the Wesleyan emphases on love and on prevenient grace? Is not the doctrine of prevenient grace often interpreted in a fashion similar to the universal sweep of Hegel’s Spirit who prepares all and incorporates all? Wesley’s presupposition that the Spirit of God is already at work in other people’s lives, even before we encounter them with the Christian message, that “grace goes beforehand,” serves a function almost parallel to Hegel’s Spirit who we recognize in retrospect to have always already been present, always already at work, expressed in even that which appears the most contrary. Furthermore, Hegel himself suggests love as a primary paradigm for observing the harmonizing movement of the Spirit at work in all of life. Love serves an important function in both Hegel’s and Wesley’s thinking. For both, love is the concrete expression of the reality that they wish to describe. Both consider love the driving force of a process of reconciliation. Wesleyans should be especially careful to guard against “perfect love” becoming a strangling embrace or “prevenient grace” a pre-commissioned mirror that serves to reflect our own idiosyncrasies.

### **Levinas: Reconciliation and Difference**

It might thus be valuable to elaborate another model for reconciliation that may be more helpful for the church and the Wesleyan tradition, and indeed more faithful to Scripture. It is formulated by the Jewish scholar and philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and often based on an exegesis of the Torah or the Talmud. His model for encounter with the other draws on Scriptural passages that explicate how one is to treat the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. His philosophy also has its starting point in and takes continual account of his experience of the holocaust and the importance of his ethical statements cannot be disassociated from that context. Throughout his works, Lévinas develops an ethics of difference and otherness, a way of dealing with another not on the basis of sameness and recognition, but in terms of a revelation or epiphany of the other that does not reduce the other to any predetermined feelings and presuppositions.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>Lévinas’ ideas are diffused and continually elaborated throughout his works. The ideas presented in this paper can be found in almost any of his books and interviews. I refer mostly to his essay “La signification et le sens” in *Humanisme de l’autre homme*.

Lévinas distinguishes between the manner in which we interact with things and the manner in which we encounter other people.<sup>36</sup> He criticizes Heidegger's ontology for not having gone far enough, for still being stuck in the egocentrism that has characterized much of the Western tradition and in which most things are examined from *my* viewpoint and as an object of *my* thought. He claims that "philosophy tends to absorb all otherness in sameness and to neutralize alterity."<sup>37</sup> Heidegger's phenomenology of the other and even his emphasis on "*Sorge*" (worry/concern/care) still proceed from *me* and see the other only as a disturbance in *my* field of vision and in *my* world. In fact, Lévinas finds objectionable the very emphasis on sight, vision, and light in the Western tradition and attempts to recover the Hebrew emphasis on the word and on hearing. For Lévinas, the other speaks to me from a sphere utterly outside myself and my influence. His starting point is an otherness that is "a movement going beyond the identical, toward another who is absolutely other."<sup>38</sup> The other does not fulfill me or satisfy my desires, but rather empties me of myself.<sup>39</sup> The others calls me and obligates me.<sup>40</sup> I cannot ignore the difference of the other to whom I am supremely obligated and who cannot be treated as a thing.<sup>41</sup>

Two themes in Lévinas' thought are closely connected, explicate the above further, and present a useful framework for our topic. They are the themes of the "face of the other" (*le visage d'Autrui*) and the "trace of the other" (*le trace de l'Autre*).<sup>42</sup> For Lévinas, the face represents the essential

<sup>36</sup>As is evidenced by the divisions of his first major work, *Totalité et Infini*.

<sup>37</sup>Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1972), 42. He rejects the "kind of relationships with alterity which differ sharply from those in which the same dominates or encompasses the other and for which knowing is the model" (idem, *Éthique et Infini: Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* [Paris: Fayard, 1982], 54). He rejects the kind of philosophy that seeks to know rather than encounter the other.

<sup>38</sup>*Humanisme*, 43.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 83. Lévinas later elaborates this obligation by speaking of myself as "hostage" of the other. I am responsible even for my own persecution. The need for justice and law only enter human relationships when there is a third for whom I am also responsible. See: *Humanisme*, 109; *Entre nous: Essais sur penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 71; or for a more detailed exposition, his work *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*.

<sup>41</sup>*Éthique*, 50.

<sup>42</sup>Lévinas is not consistent in his use of "autre" and "autrui" (and their capitalized versions), but often uses them interchangeably.

revelation of the other person.<sup>43</sup> It is not the “assembly of a nose, or a forehead, of eyes,” but he calls it the “face” because it opens a new dimension into “the perception of being. Through the face, being is not only enclosed in its form . . . but is open. . . . The face is the irreducible mode by which being can present itself in its identity.” The face is “the irreducible mode by which being can present itself in its identity.”<sup>44</sup> The epiphany of the face is that which encounters me and obligates me. The other who dominates me is “the stranger, the widow, and the orphan” toward whom I am obligated.<sup>45</sup> I have complete responsibility for the other without being able to expect the same responsibility for myself.<sup>46</sup> The face is vulnerable and open.<sup>47</sup> In its very vulnerability the face of the other forbids murder.<sup>48</sup> This is the other’s primordial word.<sup>49</sup> Yet even in killing the other, I have achieved neither control nor victory. Precisely through this murder the other has escaped my grasp completely.<sup>50</sup>

The face of the other unsettles and disturbs me. I can enter into relationship with it, yet not based on my assumptions and my level but only on the level of language, of a true listening to the other.<sup>51</sup> This discourse, opened by the face of the other, is the original discourse one cannot choose to escape by withdrawing into some type of interiority.<sup>52</sup> I cannot grasp, control, or understand the other. My very being is put in question by the other.<sup>53</sup> The face of the other upsets my world, comes to me from outside the world.<sup>54</sup> It does not become an object in the world that I can proceed

<sup>43</sup>*Humanisme*, 50ff.

<sup>44</sup>Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficile Liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1963/1976), 20.

<sup>45</sup>Idem, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l’extériorité* (Paris: Kluwer Academic, 1971), 237.

<sup>46</sup>*Éthique*, 95.

<sup>47</sup>*Humanisme*, 52.

<sup>48</sup>*Liberté*, 21ff.

<sup>49</sup>*Éthique*, 80.

<sup>50</sup>*Totalité*, 216.

<sup>51</sup>*Humanisme*, 51.

<sup>52</sup>*Totalité*, 220.

<sup>53</sup>He describes this “being put in question by the other” as follows: “The being put in question of the self is precisely the welcome of the absolutely other. The epiphany of the absolutely other is the face where the other calls me and signifies for me an order, by its nudity, by its denouement. It is its presence which is a summons to respond” (*Humanisme*, 53). See also: *Totalité*, 213.

<sup>54</sup>*Humanisme*, 63.

to investigate, but rather leaves holes behind.<sup>55</sup> It is “the nudity of the absolute opening of transcendence.”<sup>56</sup>

Though Lévinas would hesitate to put it in exactly these terms, the “face of the other” is in some sense the voice of God.<sup>57</sup> In an interview he said, “I cannot speak of a relation to God without simultaneously speaking of that which engages me with respect to the other . . . in the other there is a real presence of God. In my relation with the other I hear the Word of God.<sup>58</sup> That is not a metaphor, it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I don’t claim that the other is God, but in the face of the other I hear the Word of God.” Lévinas depicts the divine as something/someone ungraspable, as utterly other. We cannot see or touch or understand God, nor speak about God’s being, essence, or attributes in any intelligent manner.<sup>59</sup> Yet, our narrow world is disturbed and unsettled by the mysterious trace of the Other.<sup>60</sup> This trace is not a clearly legible signature, something that can be identified, but a trace of something that has passed without meaning to leave clear marks. We cannot point to a revelation or epiphany, to a God who is present. Yet, somehow the breath of Yahweh’s movement has been felt, God’s word has been heard. The trace is never something permanent, stable, visible. It is something that is always already in the past, has always already happened.<sup>61</sup> We encounter the other in this trace.<sup>62</sup> To meet God is possible only by meeting the other. The face of the other

---

<sup>55</sup>He depicts the advent of the other as a visitation, a coming “from the absolutely absent” and claims about it: “but his relation with the *absolutely absent* from where he comes, does not *indicate*, does not *reveal* that *absent one* and despite this the absent has a signification in the face” (*Humanisme*, 63). Emphasis his.

<sup>56</sup>*Totalité*, 217.

<sup>57</sup>He calls the face that comes from the outside a “sanctified” one that speaks truth by its very exteriority and “curves the inter-subjective space.” This curvature, he suggests, might be described as “the presence of God” (*Totalité*, 324).

<sup>58</sup>*Entre-nous*, 120. See also *Liberté* in which he explores the notion of a vision of the divine through the ethical relationship in Judaism. For example, *Liberté*, 31-38.

<sup>59</sup>Hegel, on the other hand, opposes himself to the idea that God might not be able to be known. If the word “God” is to have any meaning in religion, then the divine must be definable, one must be able to speak of God’s attributes and properties. To speak of “spirit” is to speak of revelation. *Enzyklopädie*, 373.

<sup>60</sup>*Humanisme*, 64ff.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

stands in the trace of the divine and is its only manifestation. To hear and respond to the other, is to have a glimpse, an echo, of God's passing.<sup>63</sup>

Reconciliation here can never mean forgetting all difference and making the same. By reducing the other to myself and thus achieving "unity," I have annihilated, killed the other and disregarded the one absolute command of all possible relationship. Reconciliation is not a movement of power (as it is in Hegel), but precisely a movement that reveals my powerlessness, a movement of reception and vulnerability.<sup>64</sup> It submits to the transcendence of the other and humbles itself under his or her otherness. It does not claim an absolute possession of "the Truth," but is open to the truth of the other. This appears to be a model of the redemptive message of reconciliation more faithful to the kenotic nature of the incarnation. In Christ, God became truly other, even entered human sin.<sup>65</sup> The kenosis presented in Scripture and in the early Fathers (particularly Greek) is one of full humiliation and self-emptying. Reconciliation cannot happen when we wait for and expect the other to become like us, a mere mirror or extension of our opinions and beliefs. Reconciliation is only possible when we become vulnerable to meet the other in his or her essential otherness, aware that we will never completely understand, never be in possession or control of the other.

Two aspects of the thoughts of Lévinas and Wesley particularly resonate and also show where Lévinas might be helpful in working toward a Wesleyan understanding of reconciliation. First, as suggested above, Wesley insists that one should be firmly convinced of one's own tradition, manner of worship, and correct doctrinal belief, and yet also proposes that one suspend all such firm convictions in encountering another person in love.<sup>66</sup> For Wesley, a concrete walk of holiness counts above all; opinion

---

<sup>63</sup>"The God who has passed is not the model of which the face is the image. To be in the image of God does not signify being an icon of God but to find oneself in his trace. The God who is revealed by our Judeo-Christian spirituality conserves all infinity of his absence which is in the personal order of itself. He does not show himself but by his trace, as in the thirty-third chapter of Exodus. To go toward him, that is not to follow that trace which is not a sign. It is to go toward the others who hold themselves in the trace of illeity" (*Humanisme*, 69f).

<sup>64</sup>*Humanisme*, 109. Or, as he says in another place: "The expression that the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my power, but my very power (or possibility) of power" (idem, *Totalité*, 215).

<sup>65</sup>According to 2. Cor. 5:21, a passage replete with and surrounded by references to reconciliation.

<sup>66</sup>See above or the sermon on the "Catholic Spirit."

and disagreements recede into the background when a person is living an authentically holy life. Lévinas believes, similarly, that a deep rootedness in the particularity of his own Jewish tradition is precisely what makes possible a universal out-going to the other.<sup>67</sup> Lévinas never advocates an abandonment of one's own tradition in order to fulfill one's ethical obligation to the other, but rather sees such tradition as founding and spelling out this obligation.

Wesley emphasizes just as strongly the importance of being firmly convinced of one's own beliefs and opinions before one approaches the other in a "catholic spirit." Thus, encountering another in love need not mean giving up one's personal convictions or Christian beliefs. In fact, a superficial syncretism or a relativism that makes no distinctions of value or theological coherence is regarded as unhelpful by both Lévinas and Wesley. Yet, to be firmly rooted in one's own beliefs does not simultaneously imply insensitivity to the views of others or a desire to proselytize. In his sermon on "bigotry" Wesley recognizes God at work in strangers and non-believers without any need to discover Christian sentiments at the same time. The truth of the other is not something to be denied, but to be valued and actively supported when it is expressed in loving and life-giving action.

Secondly, Wesley consistently highlights the social and ethical implications of his teaching. Holiness has to be practiced in every-day life by feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger (passages which also ground much of Lévinas' thinking). Wesley interprets people's religious convictions and spiritual life by how they act in love and practical social action toward others. Similarly, for Lévinas, religious convictions are best expressed in how we treat other people. There is no access to God but through the other person. One might actually say (with a slightly altered connotation) that for Lévinas, there is "no holiness but social holiness" because God's holiness is precisely experienced in encounter with the other. A Wesleyan model for evangelism would be well-advised to recover such an emphasis on a concern with others for *their* sakes and not for our own ultimate ends (of "conversion" or "higher membership" or whatever the rationale might be). A Wesleyan approach to evangelism and

---

<sup>67</sup>See several of his essays on Judaism, on Jewish-Christian relationships, on the universality of Judaism, and on the value of monotheistic religion in his book *Liberté*.

reconciliation need not condemn the “Papist,” the “Heathen,” or the “Turk” or gain their friendship only for the goal of “conversion,” but can indeed consider such others as fellow-workers in whom God is already present despite (or precisely through) all their distinctiveness and otherness. Wesleyans who listen to Wesley’s cautions against “bigotry” ideally will be characterized by outgoing compassion to others both in concrete ethical behavior and in an openness to acknowledge the trace of God in the face and voice of the other, regardless of who that other might be.

**EARLY METHODISM:  
A PARADIGM FOR NON-VIOLENCE:  
An Exercise in “Vision Ethics”<sup>1</sup>**

by

**David L. Cubie**

There is a logical relationship between the terms “Holiness” and “Non-Violence,” especially if holiness is defined ethically as Christ-likeness. Jesus did take a whip and drive the moneychangers and sellers of sacrificial animals from the Jerusalem temple. However, in the larger perspective of his teaching and life, he is an example of one who overcame evil by not retaliating. When Methodism is considered, the relationship between these two terms is not that evident, whether this be in the United Methodist Church, the Black Methodist churches, or those churches participating in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Neither Methodism nor its many daughter churches are in the peace tradition. Although the circumstances may have changed somewhat since the Vietnam War era, the figures compiled by the Methodist Church in the United States and published in Paul Schilling’s *Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective* would most likely be true for all of these churches except for those who have incorporated the Methodist holiness ideology into their peace tradition, such as the Missionary Church and the Brethren in Christ.

The statistics given by Schilling indicate that of 5,020 total responses to a questionnaire, only 2.5% indicated that under no circumstances could they support or participate in war. Only 3.2% indicated that they

---

<sup>1</sup>“An Exercise in Visional Ethics,” Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).



were nuclear pacifists. The views of 5.8% are not tabulated (write-ins, 2.6%; no report, 3.2%). The rest, 88.5%, would participate in war for their country. Of this 88.5%, 47.2% took the position that they were “obligated to support [their] country in war when its continued existence is at stake, apart from considerations of justice.”<sup>2</sup> In short, this 47.2% of the respondents were so far removed from non-violence concepts that the survival of the state takes precedence over justice. Whereas the churches of the peace tradition have in varying degrees practiced separation from the state, the churches of Methodist tradition have participated with the state in all of its wars.

### Early Methodism

**Support of the State in Just Wars.** This tradition of supporting and being supported by the state goes back to Methodist beginnings. In 1775 John Wesley wrote the following to William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth and Secretary of State for the Colonies: “All my prejudices are against the Americans. For I am an High Churchman . . . bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance.”<sup>3</sup> Loyalty to the state and obedience to its laws were fundamental rules. In 1775 “non-resistance” and “passive obedience” referred to obedience to rulers, including the bearing of arms. Military passivity seems to have been quite rare. Many Methodists served in the army and John Wesley made several converts among the soldiers. Although for Wesley obedience was never blind, armed support was possible when the cause was judged to be just. On two occasions, in 1756 and 1782 when there were threats of invasion by the French, Wesley offered to raise a company of volunteers for home defence (his offers were rejected).<sup>4</sup> What is more surprising is the militancy of that Methodist saint, John Fletcher, a native Swiss. He vigorously defended the British cause in the American Revolution. To him and almost all Britons, it was the “War of Rebellion.” In a public letter addressed to the king, Fletcher states:

<sup>2</sup>S. Paul Schilling, *Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective*, Vol. III in *Methodism and Society* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1960), Appendix B.II.27, “War,” 289.

<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, June 14, 1775, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed., John Telford, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), VI, 156. Wesley does argue in this letter for a reduction of hostilities.

<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, “To James West,” Mar. 1, 1756, *Letters*, III, 165; “To Captain Webb,” May 25, 1782, *Letters*, VIII, 123.

They have preposterously charged you with robbery, when they themselves have robbed God, by keeping from his political representatives the reasonable and legal taxes due to the supreme power; to a creative and protective power that gave them birth, and raised them from a state of weakness and want, to youthful vigour and growing opulence. . . .<sup>5</sup>

George III, king of Great Britain during the Revolutionary War, was to John Fletcher “our mild sovereign.”<sup>6</sup> To Charles Wesley he was “the mildest and the best. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

Both Fletcher and the Wesleys advocated mediation, reconciliation, and forgiveness for revolutionaries. Yet even in Fletcher’s mediation there was militancy. In his imagination he visualized the king as forgiving the colonists, saying, “Rise, yet mistaken sons of liberty, rise to demonstrate that, as we can fight like Britons, so we can forgive as Christians, and indulge as brethren. . . .”<sup>8</sup> In his “The Bible and the Sword,” Fletcher gives a rationale for the use of the sword: “. . . reason dictates, that so long as the wicked shall use the sword in support of vice, the righteous, who are in power, must use it in defense of virtue. . . .”<sup>9</sup> That there is a legitimate use of the sword was expressed in both his and John Wesley’s comments on Matthew 26:52. Fletcher states: “Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword [to use it rashly, as thou dost, without any order, and without the least probability of success] shall perish with the sword. . . .”<sup>10</sup> John Wesley also qualifies Jesus’ saying, “All they that take the sword” by the comment, “Without God’s giving it to them; without sufficient authority.”<sup>11</sup> He overlooks Jesus’ universal application, “shall perish by the

---

<sup>5</sup>John Fletcher, “American Patriotism, Letter V,” *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher*, 4 vols. (n.p., n.d.; rpt. Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, 1974), IV, 547.

<sup>6</sup>“The Bible and the Sword,” Sect. 7; *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher*, 4:557.

<sup>7</sup>“Hymn XIII,” *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 79. Also see 77 and 123. England itself was in the midst of social and Parliamentary upheaval, reminiscent of the recent United States elections of 2000-01. See W. E. Lunt, *History of England*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 543-565. See Wesley’s letters to the Earl of Dartmouth, June 14, 1775, in *Letters*, VI, 155-160 and 175-176.

<sup>8</sup>Fletcher, *Works*, IV, 551.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 555.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 555.

<sup>11</sup>John Wesley, “Matt. 26:52, *Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, n.d.; rpt. Naperville, IL, Alec R. Allenson, Inc.).

sword.” Both John Wesley and Fletcher opposed what they saw as wars of aggression and especially abhorred Britain’s role in the subjugation of India and Africa, though they blamed these wars on merchant adventurers.<sup>12</sup>

**The Evil of War.** John Wesley saw no glory in war. In his treatise on “Original Sin” he described war as a “horrid reproach to the Christian name.” He then asked, “Now, who can reconcile war, I will not say to religion, but to any degree of reason or common sense?”<sup>13</sup> War for Wesley, as it was for Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, was a judgment on both parties, an opinion which he expressed in a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth:

Upon the whole I am really sometimes afraid that “this evil is of the Lord.” When I consider (to say nothing of ten thousand and other vices shocking to human nature) the astonishing luxury of the rich and the *profaneness* of rich and poor, I doubt whether general dissoluteness of manners does not demand a general visitation. Perhaps the decree is already gone forth from the Governor of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Wesley saw no good coming out of war for anyone, much less for the advancement of the gospel. As he wrote to Thomas Rankin in May of 1775:

In all the other judgements of God the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness. When a land is visited with famine or plague or earthquake, the people commonly see and acknowledge the hand of God. But wherever war breaks out, God is forgotten, if He be not set at open defiance. What a glorious work of God was at Cambuslang and Kilsyth from 1740 to 1744! But the war that followed tore it all up by the roots and left scarce any trace of it behind; insomuch that when I diligently inquired a few years after, I could not find one that retained the life of God!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, “Journal,” Feb. 23 and Nov. 13, 1776, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 5th ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, n.d. [1872], IV, 68, 88-9. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-16), VI, 97, 131. “The Mystery of Iniquity” (1783), Sect. 33; *Works*, VI, 265. Fletcher, “American Patriotism, Letter IV,” *Works*, IV, 543.

<sup>13</sup>J. Wesley, “Original Sin,” Part I, Sect. II.10; *Works*, IX, 221.

<sup>14</sup>J. Wesley, June 14, 1775, *Letters*, VI, 159.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, May 19, 1775, 150-51.

We must conclude that for John Wesley war may, under certain circumstances, be the lesser of two evils, especially at times of national defence. Nevertheless, it is a great evil.

Despite a just-war position, John and Charles did hold a position that is akin to the modern concept of non-violence. It appeared under two forms: (1) a belief that the gospel and any physical defence of it are contradictory; and (2) the right or even responsibility of a preacher not to bear arms.

**Pacifism as an Expression of the Gospel Dispensation.** The gospel dispensation, which begins with Christ, exists side by side with the continuing dispensation of the natural man or even of the law, and exists with a different set of ethical principles. The theory held is that those who belong to the gospel dispensation are called to live a radically different life than those of the natural dispensation. This does not imply condemnation of those who have not discovered the gospel dispensation. In fact, God may use each person within the context of the dispensation in which he or she lives. An interesting twist to this dispensational view, though not directly related to pacifism, is Wesley's suggestion that possibly God would use the ungodly within the church to defend it. "Otherwise," he says, "the wolves that surround the little flock on every side would in a short time tear them in pieces."<sup>16</sup> Fletcher does not apply his "dispensation of the spirit" to any form of pacifism. Even the millennium is for Fletcher a time of peace enforced by the sword.<sup>17</sup>

One clear witness against any use of violence, including military activity, by those in the Gospel dispensation came from the American Methodist, Freeborn Garrettson. He, according to Donald and Lucille Dayton,

suffered beating and imprisonment and was nearly hanged on two occasions. His conviction was expressed in the words: "From reading, my own reflection, and the teachings of the good Spirit, I was quite drawn away from a belief in the lawfulness of shedding human blood under the gospel dispensa-

---

<sup>16</sup>J. Wesley, "Of the Church" (1786), Sect. 29, *Works*, VI, 400.

<sup>17</sup>See "The Bible and the Sword," Sect. 3; Fletcher's *Works*, 4:555-556.

tion, or at most it must be an extreme case, touching which at that time my mind was in doubt.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet this radical witness was rare. The general position was one of supporting the state, at least in just wars, including the suppression of rebellion.

John Nelson, one of Wesley’s preachers, is another example of passive resistance among those of the gospel dispensation and as a preacher of the gospel. Nelson, a large and vigorous man, whom Charles Wesley referred to as “heartly John Nelson,”<sup>19</sup> learned his non-resistance in Methodism. He began preaching in the Christmas season of 1740 in his home community of Birstall and in the surrounding communities in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. At Birstall, Leeds, Bradford, York, and Epworth he suffered severe beatings, more than once being left for dead. It was a day when the mob was a political tool, sometimes hired by local clergy. Nelson would not let such hostility halt his preaching. To some who warned him not to go to Leeds because of a waiting mob, he answered: “They must ask my Father’s leave; for if He have any more work for me to do, all the men in the town cannot kill me till I have done it.”<sup>20</sup> He rested in God’s providence, a concept he learned within Methodism, as witnessed by the letter John Wesley wrote to him soon after Nelson was forced into the military:

Well, my brother, is the God whom you serve able to deliver you? and do you find Him faithful to His word? Is His grace still sufficient for you? I doubt it not. He will not suffer you to be weary or faint in your mind. But He had work for you to do which you knew not of, and thus His Counsel was to be fulfilled. O lose no time! Who knows how many souls God may by this means deliver into your hands? Shall not all these

---

<sup>18</sup>Donald W. and Lucille S. Dayton, “An Historical Survey of Attitudes Toward War and Peace Within the American Holiness Movement,” in *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace*, ed. Paul Hostetler (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1974), 136, quoting Wade Barclay, *Early American Methodism 1769-1844*, “History of Methodist Missions, Part I” (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), I, 48, who is quoting Nathan Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garretson* (New York: Mason & Lane, 1838), 57ff.

<sup>19</sup>Charles Wesley, Letter XX, Sept. 26, 1750, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed., Thomas Jackson, 2 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room, 1849), II, 191.

<sup>20</sup>John Telford, *Wesley’s Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told By Themselves*, 7 vols. (1912; rpt. Salem, OH: Schmull Publishers, 1976), III, 66.

things be for the furtherance of the gospel? And is not the time coming when we shall cry out together, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us”?<sup>21</sup>

On May 3, 1744, because he was a Methodist traveling preacher and thus to many a vagrant, Nelson was pressed into the army contrary to his legal rights. “Many,” according to John Wesley, “were ready to testify that he was in no respect such a person as the Act of Parliament specified [a vagrant]. But they were not heard. He was a preacher! that was enough. So he was sent for a soldier at once.”<sup>22</sup> He refused wages, the reception of which would have sealed his contract. Though forced to march, he affirmed he would not fight. His reason: “I shall not fight; for I cannot bow my knee before the Lord to pray for a man, and get up and kill him when I have done.”<sup>23</sup> When officers ordered that he be equipped with a gun and other instruments of war, he asked, “Why do you gird me with these war-like habiliments? for I am a man averse to war, and shall not fight but under the Prince of Peace, the Captain of my salvation; and the weapons He gives me are not carnal like these.”<sup>24</sup> Later, when they forced a uniform on him he said:

“You may array me as a man of war, but I shall never fight.” They asked me, “What is your reason?” My answer was, “I cannot see anything in this world worth fighting for. I want neither its riches nor honours, but the honour that cometh from God only; I regard neither its smiles, nor its frowns; and have no business in it, but to get well out of it.”<sup>25</sup>

Nelson’s liberty was later purchased through a substitute, though apparently without his knowledge.<sup>26</sup> His position seems to have been a pri-

---

<sup>21</sup>J. Wesley, May, 1744, *Letters*, II, 20.

<sup>22</sup>J. Wesley, May 15, 1744, *Journal*, III, 139.

<sup>23</sup>Telford, *Wesley’s Veterans*, III, 120.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 146-47.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 148. Nelson’s case may have been in the minds of those attending the first Conference, June 25-30, 1744. The question “Is it lawful to bear arms?” was asked and answered: “We incline to think it is: 1. Because there is no command against it in the New Testament; 2. Because Cornelius, a soldier, is commended there, and not mentioned to have laid them down.” Richard Cameron, “Bennett’s Minutes,” *The Rise of Methodism: A Source Book* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 360.

vate call to pacifism, which was possibly related to his role as a preacher; nevertheless, he does not condemn the soldier for his role. This is illustrated by the following conversation with a major that took place just prior to his release:

“Well,” said the major, “if you be so scrupulous about fighting, what must we do?” I answered, “It is your trade; and if you had a better, it might be better for you.” But somebody,” he replied, “must fight.” I said, “If all men lived by faith in the Son of God, wars would be at an end.” “That is true,” he answered: “If it were so, we should learn war no more.”<sup>27</sup>

Notice the phrase “if you had a better.” The soldier could obey the call to a better trade. Or is there a more radical position implied: if only the major would live “by faith in the Son of God”? Although the Daytons can say, “It is not clear what forces led Nelson to take this position” [of pacifism],<sup>28</sup> two influences are present—the Quakers and the Wesleys. Prior to finding peace among the Methodists, Nelson had spent three months with the Quakers, who may also have had an indirect influence on him through Charles Wesley.

Charles Wesley himself is a paradoxical paradigm for non-violence. He was in full support of king and Parliament in their suppression of the “war of rebellion” in the “colonies,” to use British terms. In his lengthy poem “The American War” (1779), he especially castigated Sir William Howe for not pressing the war with greater vigor.<sup>29</sup> Yet war is not heroic; he described it, as did John, as an evil, with its origins in the lust for power.

Whence comes wars and deadly feuds,  
Slaughtering half the human race?  
Lust the social love excludes,  
Sets our passions in a blaze,  
Fills our hearts with fury blind,  
Arms us each against his kind.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, III, 120.

<sup>28</sup>Dayton, “Historical Survey,” 135.

<sup>29</sup>See *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books: Abingdon Press, 1988), 1:43-57.

<sup>30</sup>From his Manuscript “Patriotism,” as cited by Kimbrough and Beckerlegge, *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 1:67.

Charles, with all his vigorous defense of the king and opposition to the revolutionaries in 1779, whose leaders he identified with anti-christ, nevertheless was in the 1740s Methodism's primary teacher of pacifism in defense of the gospel. He recorded in his *Journal* on February 6, 1744: "An honest Quaker has hardly restrained some of the brethren from resisting evil; but henceforth, I hope, they will meekly turn the other cheek."<sup>31</sup> Again, on Shrove-Tuesday, February 7, he recorded:

I waked in great heaviness, which continued all day, for our poor suffering brethren; yet with strong confidence that the Lord will appear in their behalf. . . . After fighting with wild beasts for near half-an-hour, I went down into the thickest of them; who started back, and left an open way for me to the Mayor's house. . . . [Afterwards] the brethren . . . conducted us to our friendly Quaker's [house]. We betook ourselves to prayer for our fellow-sufferers in Staffordshire, who have not been out of our thoughts the whole day. I expounded the beatitudes, and dwelt upon the last: never have I been more assisted. I rejoiced with our brethren in the fires.<sup>32</sup>

The last beatitudes are "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake" and "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:10, 11).

Charles was teaching the art of non-resistance in the defense of the Gospel to the Methodists for whom the year 1744 was especially difficult. Just prior to the above entries (on February 4, 1744), Charles in his *Journal* took a quite radical pacifist position:

I discoursed from Isai. liv.17: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." This promise shall be fulfilled in our day. I spoke with those of our brethren who have this world's goods, and found them entirely resigned to the will of God. All thoughts of resistance are over, blessed by the Lord; and the chief of them said unto me, "Naked came I into the world, and I can but go naked out of it." They are resolved by the grace of God to follow my advice, and suffer all things. Only I would have had them go round again to the Justices, and make information of their danger. . . .<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>C. Wesley, Feb. 6, 1744, *Journal*, I, 348.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1744, 348-49.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, Feb. 4, 1744, 347.



He rejoiced over those who succeeded in non-resistance:

A note I received from two of the sufferers, whose loss amounts to about £200. My heart rejoiced in the great grace which was given them; for not one resisted evil; but they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. We gave God the glory, that Satan was not suffered to touch their lives. They have lost all besides, and rejoice with joy unspeakable.<sup>34</sup>

He also sorrowed over failures:

I sent away J. Healey, that he might not be torn to pieces by the mob, some of whom he has struck. It was so at Nottingham, where they brought persecution upon themselves, a little sooner than needed, by striking a butcher. The man who struck him was the first that fell away. Not that all their meekness and wisdom could have kept it off long.<sup>35</sup>

Charles Wesley was somewhat of a tactician. He records how he

. . . found a great mob about our house, and bestowed an hour in taming them. An hundred or more I admitted into the room, and, when I had got them together, for two hours exhorted them to repent, in the power of love. The rocks were melted on every side, and the very ringleaders of the rebels declared they would make a disturbance no more.<sup>36</sup>

Charles sought for the right time, the avoidance of “unnecessary dangers,” and the appropriate redress to law. But after being mocked by a mayor who promised protection, he adds the advice, “we may learn not to lean on that broken reed, human protection. . . .”<sup>37</sup> Human tactics were not sufficient. As it was with both John Nelson and John Wesley, so also central to Charles’s concept of non-resistance was God’s providential care: “Never did I more clearly see that not a hair of our head can fall to the ground, without our heavenly Father.”<sup>38</sup>

John Wesley also taught non-resistance, but not with the same vigor as did Charles, who taught suffering the loss of all things. In commenting on Matthew 5:39-41, John gives the qualifiers “where the damage is not

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., Feb. 9, 1774, 350.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Feb. 19, 1744, 352.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Feb. 26, 1744, 353.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Feb. 8, 1744, 349.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., Feb. 8, 1744, 349.

too great” and “when the wrong is purely personal.” His total comment is:

40-1. Where the damage is not great, choose rather to suffer it, though possibly it may on that account be repeated, than to demand “an eye for an eye,” to enter into a rigorous prosecution of the offender. The meaning of the whole passage seems to be, rather than return evil for evil, when the wrong is purely personal, submit to one bodily wrong after another; give up one part of your goods after another; submit to one instance of compulsion after another. That the words are not literally to be understood appears from the behaviour of our Lord Himself (John xviii:22-3).<sup>39</sup>

The passage to which he refers reads: “One of the officers who stood by gave Jesus a blow, saying, ‘Answerest thou the high priest so?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?’”

John Wesley’s interpretation of Jesus’ words, “blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9), does not begin to approach pacifism. Instead, he interprets them as, “They that out of love to God and man, do all possible good to all men.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, he adds the following description of peacemakers: “They endeavour to calm the stormy spirits of men, to quiet their turbulent passions, to soften the minds of contending parties, and if possible reconcile them to each other.”<sup>41</sup> The principle expressed was applied in his correspondence with the government on behalf of the colonists. Even after hostilities with the colonies broke out, he sought to persuade the government to find another way rather than arms.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, his ultimate loyalty was to the king and his right to suppress the rebellion. After the peace was signed, Wesley accepted the independence of the colonies as in God’s providence.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Wesley, *Notes*.

<sup>40</sup>*Notes on the New Testament*. See also the sermon, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Third,” Section II:1-5; *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, 1:517-519.

<sup>41</sup>“Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Third,” Sections II.3; *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, 1:518.

<sup>42</sup>See “Letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, June 14, 1775; *Letters*, VI, 155-160.

<sup>43</sup>See Letter, “To ‘Our Bretheren in America,’” Sept. 10, 1784, *Letters*, 7:238.

For John Wesley, non-resistance seems to have had primary reference to the preachers of the gospel, as his comments on Luke 22:38 seem to indicate:

22. *Here are two swords*—Many of Galilee carried them when they travelled, to defend themselves against robbers and assassins, who much infested their roads. But did the apostles need to seek such defense? *And he said, It is enough*—I do not mean literally that every one of you must have a sword.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Wesley saw that all who pursue righteousness, even though peaceably, will suffer persecution. He comments on the beatitudes:

9. *The peacemakers*—They that, out of love to God and man, do all possible good to all men. . . . One would imagine a person of this amiable temper and behaviour would be the darling of mankind. . . .

10. *For righteousness' sake*—He that is truly a righteous man, he that mourns, and he that is “pure in heart,” yea, all “that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. iii:12).<sup>45</sup>

Although John Wesley’s position on non-resistance in defence of the Gospel does not seem to have been as clear-cut as that of Charles, nevertheless, by placing his preachers in a non-resistance position, he extended early Methodism’s usefulness to us as a paradigm.

**Ministerial Conscientious Objection.** Another example of pacifism is that ministers of the gospel ought not to be involved in war. One expression of this is that of civil neutrality. John Wesley’s advice sent to Thomas Rankin and the other preachers in America advocating civil neutrality brought the American Methodists into a period of misunderstanding and persecution. Neutrality itself became an occasion for non-violent response. John Wesley’s letter of March 1, 1775, to the American brethren via Thomas Rankin was probably still on the high seas when the Minutemen rose up against the Redcoats on the night of April 18-19. In this he advised neutrality and peacemaking:

---

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

My Dear Brethren,

You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peace-makers: to be loving and tender to all; but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side. Keep yourselves pure: Do all you can to help and soften all: but beware how you adopt another's jar.

See that you act in full union with each other. . . .

Mark all those that would set one of you against the other. . . .

. . . Be in peace with each other, and the God of peace will be with you.<sup>46</sup>

Charles also advocated civil neutrality in his letter which accompanied John's: "Private Christians are excused, exempted, privileged, to take no part in civil troubles. We love all, and pray for all, with a sincere and impartial love. . . ." <sup>47</sup> Later, John Wesley advised his British preachers in America to return home. All but Francis Asbury did.

Both Asbury and many of the American preachers took a position, if not of neutrality, at least of conscientious objection as ministers. Asbury, because he chose a position of neutrality, chose to reside in Delaware, which apparently had less stringent laws. As he states: "From March 10, 1778, on conscientious principles I was a non-juror, and could not preach in the State of Maryland; and therefore withdrew to the Delaware State. . . ." Of interest is that he says in his ensuing comments that "I could have taken the oath of the Delaware State, had it been required; and would have done it, had I not been prevented by a tender fear of hurting the scrupulous consciences of others. . . ." <sup>48</sup> The difference between the states apparently was over the privilege of ministerial conscientious objection. According to Richard Cameron, "Francis Asbury, believing that he as a minister should not bear arms, refused to sign an oath presented to him by the authorities in Maryland where anti-Tory activities were especially intense."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>J. Wesley, Mar. 1, 1775, "To All the Preachers"; written before the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill (April and June of 1775); *Letters*, XII, 324.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>48</sup>Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, et al., 3 vols. (London: Epworth Press, and Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1958), I, 267.

<sup>49</sup>Richard Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*, Vol. I, *Methodism and Society* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1961), 89.

Though some Methodist preachers in America such as Asbury could for conscience sake claim the privilege as ministers of assuming a neutral position in civil strife or of being non-combatants in any war, others such as Thomas Ware took the stance of the patriot. Ware said, "this cause I held to be just . . . the principles for which we were contending . . . worth risking life for."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, according to the Daytons, "it is striking, particularly in contrast to British Methodism, that the major witness left by the American Methodists during the Revolutionary War was one of conscientious objection."<sup>51</sup> As has been observed, this was primarily ministerial conscientious objection, but an objection that could be logically applied to all Christians.

Among those conscientious objectors were the American preachers Freeborn Garrettson, Philip Gatch, and Jesse Lee. The following is Lee's witness about his response to his draft into the North Carolina militia: "I weighed the matter over and over again, but my mind was settled; as a Christian and as a preacher of the gospel I could not fight. I could not reconcile it to myself to bear arms, or to kill one of my fellow creatures."<sup>52</sup> Instead, from July of 1780 to October of that year when he was dismissed, he served as a non-combatant, driving a baggage wagon because, as he said, "I was a friend to my country, and was willing to do anything that I could, while I continued in the army, except that of fighting. . . ."<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that ministerial privilege was not perceived benignly by the revolutionists. It made the Methodists suspect and brought on much of the persecution of the mobs. It was not an easy time to be a Methodist preacher. Philip Gatch was tarred and feathered by a mob, the hot tar destroying one eye. Freeborn Garrettson was frequently mobbed; he was beaten and twice threatened with hanging as he itinerated from North Carolina to New Jersey.<sup>54</sup>

**Positive Results of Passive Resistance.** There were positive results of the practice of non-violence among early Methodists. That which is

<sup>50</sup>Dayton, "Historical Survey," 136, quoting Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, 49, who is quoting *The Life and Travels of the Rev. Thomas Ware* (New York: Lane & Sandford, 1842), 29f.

<sup>51</sup>Dayton, "Historical Survey," 136.

<sup>52</sup>Minton Thrift, *Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee* (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1823; rpt. Arno Press, 1969), 26, as quoted by Dayton, "Historical Survey," 136.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 28, as quoted by Dayton, "Historical Survey," 136.

<sup>54</sup>See Herbert Asbury, *A Methodist Saint: The Life of Bishop Asbury* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 114-19.

most remarkable is the increase of their followers. Methodism grew rapidly during its times of persecution, both in England and in America. These early Methodists are instructive in that they were willing to speak out, bear persecution, and yet speak again. Because John Nelson preached, he was pressed into the army. While in the army, he not only refused to kill, he also continued to preach, and although jailed, sometimes in the foulest dungeons by hostile officers, when released he again preached to the people in the fields. His became a celebrated cause, publicized by the English press. Wherever the army went the crowds gathered to hear John Nelson preach. The very notoriety of the Methodist preachers both in England in the 1740s and '50s and in America during the 1770s ensured them an audience. They were amazing men who would not be silenced, even preaching through jail windows, as did Joseph Hartley, companion of Garretson. According to Herbert Asbury, Hartley "discoursed with such evangelistic fury that great throngs were soon attracted; people came from fifteen to twenty miles round to hear the imprisoned preacher expound the Wesleyan doctrines."<sup>55</sup>

### **Ethical Analysis and Application**

**Some Principles.** The histories of Methodism and the Holiness Movement do not give us a peace tradition, but do provide paradigms that indicate that non-violence is a rational choice over against returning violence for violence. The Christian is faced, not with an irrefutable dogma, but a faith choice, one which, both in intimate relationships and in places of public responsibility, is to be tested, as the prophet reminds us: "Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing" (Malachi 3:10).

**Application by Individuals.** Is this paradigm of non-resistance translatable from suffering for the sake of the gospel to suffering for the sake of social justice and other ethical convictions? Is it translatable from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first? These questions must be answered first from the perspective of how a paradigm is to be used. As a teaching tool, its claim to usefulness can be verified only by practice. From the biblical perspective obedience to a truth or to God's will is a learning process containing trial, error, and difficulty. We are to "prove what is the perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). We "learn obedience through suffering"

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 115.

and are “trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:8,14). Learning is a step-by-step discovery about the will of God and about God’s faithfulness to his promises in relationship to that will.

The one proving God’s will is actually the person through whom God is planning to bring about change. This assurance of personal call is necessary, even if the command or principle is a universal one which is to be obeyed by all. Assurance need not be mystical in nature, but the individual must come to a conviction through the learning process that he or she is the one upon whom the command with its promises rests. Before the voice of a prophet of righteousness can call for non-violent action against evil on a national scale, he or she must have proven the truth of non-violent action in the personal relationships of the home and work place. There must be at the grass roots the conviction that God will bring righteousness out of the suffering of his sons and daughters. God’s love must be perfected in us as love for one another (1 John 4:12) before it can be utilized before rulers in the day of trial “in this world” (1 John 4:17). The non-violent troops for social transformation must be derived from those who have already learned non-violence in a variety of personal relationships. Of course, time and circumstances do not wait for us to learn. When the responsibility arises for proving God’s perfect will, the battle is already on. Nevertheless, the righteousness of the person’s response must be wholistic. God’s grace cannot be discovered in the larger cause and abandoned at the personal level. Learning at the microcosm of social relationships in the home and work-place prepares us for application at the macrocosm of social upheaval and persecution. From the Christian perspective, what is being learned is not a principle which can be utilized for a cause, but rather that God is purposing righteousness and that he gives grace to and works through those who pursue his righteousness despite personal cost. Paul affirmed that even creation is waiting “with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom.8:19). Learning itself is wholistic. God’s grace is not really known unless it is discovered in every relationship.

**More Recent Examples.** The witness of three more recent examples illustrate the importance of this wholistic application. The first is that of Mary Slessor (1848-1915), a missionary to Okoyong, in what is now Nigeria. In the course of her duties she became involved in protecting women, slaves, and twins from tribal laws and taboos and in the process brought about more humane standards in that region. One social evil,

which the western slave trade had exacerbated, was the constant fighting between tribes. Offenses were settled by war. Hearing of one such war, she ran to where the combatants were assembled, the wronged tribe averring that “we must fight to wipe out the disgrace.” Turning to the village under attack, she encountered a solid wall of hostile warriors. Reconciliation began, however, when an old chief stepped out from among the warriors and addressed her: “Ma, we thank you for coming. We admit the wounding of the chief, but it was the act of one man. . . . We beg you to use your influence with the injured party in the interests of peace.” According to Slessor’s biographer, “It was [a] chief with whom she had traveled in the rain to see and heal when she first came to Okoyong. Her act of self-sacrifice and courage had borne fruit. . . .”<sup>56</sup>

Josef Korbel is a twentieth-century example of non-violence. He is witness to the transforming power of Christian love. A Salvation Army officer in Czechoslovakia, he was thrown into prison by the Communist authorities just shortly before he and his wife were to go to South Africa as missionaries. While being detained for trial, he was placed in a cell with a man who in insane fury had attacked the guard. When Korbel looked at the man in the dimly lit cell, he saw that he had “the face of an insane man! He gazed at me, grinned and growled like a furious animal.” Through the days which followed, Korbel moved from fear to care. He began with bathing the mucous-covered sores on the man’s feet, which were sticking out from under the bed where the crazed prisoner hid. The man was gradually transformed: from muteness to speaking, then to reading the Bible, and finally to the complete restoration of his mind. This last occurred after he had confessed his own false accusation against a friend who was helping him smuggle documents to the West. Josef Korbel’s testimony is: “I’m afraid the guards gave *me* the credit, believing that it was my influence which caused this change. But Miroslav [his cell mate] and I knew better. The glory—all of it—belongs to the Lord, Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

Another twentieth-century example of the persuasive power of passive resistance was the freedom fight of Martin Luther King. His stated faith was that the hearts of the opponents would be changed by the process of passive resistance. His most famous oration affirmed, “I have a dream.”

---

<sup>56</sup>W. P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar: Pioneer Missionary*, 6th ed. (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 109-10.

<sup>57</sup>Josef Korbel with Frank Allnutt, *In My Enemy’s Camp* (Westminster, CO: Christian Resource Communications, 1976), 127, 138.



His passive resistance against evil was founded upon a vision, not only of what was a right response to enemies, but also that that right response would bring to pass a spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation.

The danger of recounting these examples is that they can be dismissed as applicable to the unique individual. J. O. Urmson even argues for an ethical category of saints and heroes that includes those “going beyond duty proper.”<sup>58</sup> But that which distinguishes the Wesleyan tradition is its affirmation that *all* believers are called to be saints. If a course of moral action is demonstrably right, it makes a claim upon all. Thus, even as the New Testament uses Christ’s giving of himself for others as an example of how Christians ought to live (Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 15:1-3; Mark 10:43-45; et al), whatever righteousness is demonstrated as possible for one is demonstrated as possible for all. This claim is not a law that assigns guilt for failure, but rather a call that must be learned and appropriated through testing. Jesus Christ is the supreme paradigm. Nevertheless, he may seem remote in time and greatness as Son of God. Contemporary paradigms demonstrate that the Christ-like life is a moral claim that the Christian, the church, and even society, salted by Christians, are called to appropriate.

Unless the principle of non-violence is seen as having a universal claim upon all Christians and through demonstration made into a universal truth which can be recommended to all of society, then the church itself will fail in saintliness and holiness. The church can boast of its hero-saints and at the same time fail to become holy, that is, to appropriate Christ-likeness as a body.

**American Methodism as a Negative Paradigm.** Can Christlikeness be appropriated by a body of people, recognizing that in the appropriation of any truth by any group there will be a difference between those who have begun to learn the truth and those willing to risk all to attain it? The early Methodists are a paradigm of non-violence in the proclamation of the gospel. They were also successful in ameliorating the condition of people in society. Their one great failure was in response to American slavery, probably because slavery threatened the survival of Methodism itself. In the years following the Revolution and prior to and during the Civil War that which threatened was the division and destruction of the Methodist Church. Brother did not want to break fellowship with brother. This was not because of a lack of serious endeavor, however.

---

<sup>58</sup>J. O. Urmson, “Saints and Heroes,” in *Moral Concepts*, ed. Joel Feinberg (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 73.

In the Conference of 1780 the preachers present took a strong stand against slavery but, according to Richard Cameron, “In the months which followed,” though they courageously proclaimed the stand of the Conference on slavery, “the struggle was too intense and too constant for them to bear.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, in the Conference of 1785 they suspended “the execution of the minute[s] on slavery till the deliberations of a future Conference.”<sup>60</sup> Lest we fault them for lack of courage, we should note that all ninety-eight preachers admitted to the Conference between 1774 and 1784 were from the South. It was this group that had taken the strong stand against slavery initially. Furthermore, Methodism’s growth during this period was in the South. Of 15,000 members, only 2,500 lived north of Maryland. Methodism was growing precisely where slavery was entrenched.

The need for acceptance was not in one direction only, as Cameron observes: “Once, after some ‘principle friends’ had demanded repeal of the slavery rules, a counter-threat [by Asbury] to withdraw from the circuit made them ‘draw in their horns’ . . . indicating that [even among slave owners] their Methodism meant a great deal to them indeed.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, there were strong ministerial voices in opposition to the anti-slavery rules. Thus Jesse Lee, who took a pacifistic position regarding war, “notes that the rules on slavery were a disservice to society.”<sup>62</sup> Though Asbury eventually yielded, he saw the practice of slavery and compromising to accommodate slave-owning members as contrary to holiness. He was grieved over the tactical choice of what seemed the lesser of two evils. As he notes in his journal of January 1, 1798: “It is man’s work, of two evils to choose the least. But God is not tempted of us to evil, neither tempteth he any man. Christians, of two evils should not choose or use either, if they would be like God.”<sup>63</sup> Asbury was referring to Jesus’ command: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Methodism in its days of corporate success did not take the risk to be holy as Christ is holy. Although the issue of slavery was eventually settled by the Civil War, undoubtedly it was the suffering of the abo-

---

<sup>59</sup>Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*, 100-01.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 100, quoting Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 4 vols. (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1864), II, 249-50.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>63</sup>F. Asbury, *The Journal and Letters*, II, 149.

litionists of both races that eventually made the freeing of the slaves a national cause, even though initially the war was fought to save the Union.

The same struggle between holiness and institutional life has been repeated over and over in the history of the church. Just as individuals such as John Nelson and Freeborn Garrettson risked death to preach the gospel, the same step of faith must be taken by corporate bodies. But they too are in a learning process. Just as truth advances among all through the example of individuals, so also, if truth is to be advanced on the larger scale, institutional paradigms, whether of smaller or larger groups, are needed to demonstrate the principles of non-violence to all. The call to holiness must not just be individual but also institutional.

### **Conclusion**

How should a truth be placed in practice? The practical application is always the point of stress, whether by the individual or group. The method of living out the paradigm is always conditioned by the insights of the individual or group at the point of their responsibility. Lessons may be learned from others. But these “how-to’s” never remove the risk of the decision itself. As Jesus describes such moments: “This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict” (Luke 21:13-15). The insight belongs to the moment and situation. This does not preclude preparation. Paradigms themselves are that. They are so that “when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them” (John 16:4). They are in themselves reminders both of principle and grace.

The continuing experience in which John Nelson learned the art of non-violence was persecution by those who opposed Methodist lay preaching. It is here that we gain instruction. The early non-resistance of Methodists to persecution as they proclaimed the gospel is a paradigm which can be applied to our situations that call for justice and righteousness. We, too, must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness with the same confidence that all things belong to God and, in his order, to us as well (Matt. 6:33).

# **SPEAKING GRACEFULLY: THE DYNAMIC OF LANGUAGE IN THE ECONOMY OF RECONCILIATION**

by

**Nathan R. Kerr**

For all the current talk of a theology that would reflect upon Christian practice, it is interesting that we “theorists” shift nervously in our seats when such talk turns to discussing the role of *power* in this practice. The truth is, in a culture seemingly driven by the continually shifting paradigms of authority and control, we remain uncertain as to where precisely within this complex web of power—a power all too often based on fear, seeking domination, and always edging toward violence—to locate authentic Christian practice.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in the face of this dilemma, the theologian has been asked to imagine what “power” may look like in this context when given a particularly *Christian* guise. So, in the meager mode of reflective words, the theologian has sought to offer a language whereby Christianity might stake its claim as authoritative in a world where any such claims are all but doomed to failure in the fluctuating tides of post-modernism.

When all is said and done, the theologian is left to hope that theoretical continuation and reformulation of the classical Christian definition of power will open up a space for more genuine Christian practice, as if this new language of power were alone the space whereby we might move

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 1.

beyond the impasse of where finally to locate Christian practice itself. It is here that the all-important question surfaces: Can this language—this discourse of power—be an effective means of transformative ethical reconciliation in our world today?

The answer, straightaway, is no. Not “no” there cannot be a specifically *Christian* understanding of language inscribed with the power of reconciliation, but “no” such a language of power, formulated in reflective isolation from the economy of Christian practice, cannot be a means of effecting reconciliation. Theology rendered in this way, as a mode of theorizing reflectively distanced from the economy of reconciliation in which Christian practice is enacted, suffers a rupture of language and power, for it is an abstraction of theology from the one Word—the *Logos*—of God which reveals itself precisely *in* this economy. Such language, in its attempt to secure a more proper reference for theological reflection, bears the conventional marks of unbreachable closure and security, static disembodiment, and confident self-possession. I contend that, by contrast, theological language is only truly reconciliatory insofar as it is inscribed by the marks of openness and vulnerability, bodily displacement, and extreme gratitude.

Eventually, the explication of precisely such a language, drawn along Eucharistic lines, will be our main concern. But, to begin with, we shall consider the *Logos* of God in Christ as the very incarnation and utterance of power (*dunamis*) itself. In the person of Jesus Christ, power is mediated through the spoken word, and this spoken word in turn is the true condition for all reconciliation, both divine-human and inter-personal. Secondly, we will explore how John Wesley’s sacramentally theological language offers a site for the convergence of this theological and ethical reconciliation as a mode of communication that is always first and foremost a living in response to the voice of the Other.<sup>2</sup> The Eucharist, for Wesley, provides the paradigmatic context for language itself to be truly reconciliatory. Finally, it will be shown that if theological language is to be a means of genuine reconciliation, it must be a language rooted in and arising out of Christian practice itself, practice that is patterned by the discursive power of God’s Word—the Eucharistic *Logos*—spoken in the econo-

---

<sup>2</sup>Throughout this essay, I have capitalized “Other” when speaking of one’s relationships to God and neighbor in an attempt to illustrate that “otherness” is never generalized in such relations, but always particularized as “that one” to whom I am related.

my of reconciliation. As theological language is inscribed by the Eucharist, it is transformed and defined by the *Logos* of Christ as an Other-centered, reconciliatory language identified by the crucial marks of openness and vulnerability, bodily displacement, and extreme gratitude. Because such language receives its power only as a *divine* gift revealed in the eternal *Logos*, this renders any abstraction of language impossible, and refuses any acceptance of a mere “appearance” of reconciliation.

### **Logos: The Christic Utterance of Power and Reconciliation**

When one turns to the New Testament in an attempt to reread the notion of power within the dynamics of reconciliation, one is struck with the coincidence of the use of the word *dunamis* with the incarnation of God in Christ. For the New Testament writers, Jesus is the bearer of power in the absolute.<sup>3</sup> We begin, then, with the revelation of God in Christ, and see how the concept of power plays itself out in this incarnated deity. On the one hand, the *dynamic* nature of the Christ event itself brings about a radical shift in the understanding and usage of the word *dunamis*. *Dunamis* had been understood as predicative of an impersonal, neutral deity whose attributive use of power was the underlying substance of the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> In the Jesus of the New Testament, however, this power is construed in terms of a human, personal deity whose power is nestled within the weakness of human flesh. Thus, *dunamis* for the New Testament writers *is* the embodied *Logos* of God in Jesus Christ; he, according to the witness of Paul, *is* the power of God (1 Cor. 1:24). Furthermore, insofar as this power is entrenched in the personal nature of his deity, in Christ divine *dunamis* is mediated through the spoken word; Christ, as the divine *Logos*, speaks with the *voice* of *omnipotence*.<sup>5</sup> The Word of Jesus is, effectually, the Word

<sup>3</sup>Therefore, “the power of God . . . must not be confounded with any high, exalted force, known or knowable. . . . Being completely different, it is the KRISIS of all power, that by which all power is measured, and by which it is pronounced to be both something and—nothing, nothing and—something. . . . The power of God stands neither at the side of nor above—supernatural!—these limited and limiting powers. . . . It can neither be substituted for them nor ranged with them, and, save with the greatest caution, it cannot even be compared with them.” Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 36.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Grundmann, “*Dunamai* [etc.],” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2:286-90.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 302.

of power; who Jesus Christ is as the power of God becomes inseparable from the voice with which he speaks (Rev. 1:12).

But this is a strange power indeed; the voice of Christ does not cohere very well with our twentieth-century understanding of language and power, in which the great orator is the one who apprehends our attention, our gaze, with the authority of his or her voice, the power of his or her persona, and the eloquence of his or her speech. Rather, the power of the Word manifests itself in the polyphonic and cacophonous voice of one whose embodied history is bracketed by the shrill whining of a babe in a manger and the excruciatingly derelict cry from a cross. Here, in Christ, is revealed a language that is no longer a hegemony at work within a totality, but rather the speaking of the unspeakable—the breaking in upon the closed circle of power that we humans call “language.”

Consequently, as John Milbank has aptly noted, the human words which carry with them a temporary force working in the interests of selfish power are interrupted—irrupted into—and shown to be ultimately powerless.<sup>6</sup> Here Christ, and Christ alone, becomes the condition for language,<sup>7</sup> a revealed *Ursprache* in which the *Logos*—the Word—serves as the “pre-originary saying,” to use a Levinasian phrase,<sup>8</sup> which does not do away with human language, but in fact constitutes its genuineness. As such, the gospel writers narrate in Christ “a transformation which combines human words with power over violence and death in the suffering body itself.”<sup>9</sup> It is in the cacophonous suffering of this human body that one hears the *Logos* of God in Christ as “the greatest of all communications of *dynamis*,”<sup>10</sup> and thus as the language of power *par excellence*. This is true for Christ in that, as far as languages go, his is a bodily solidarity, one in which his very flesh is the incarnation of that Word alone by which humanity shall live (John 6; cf. Deut. 8:3). This renders theological language, as spoken by Christ, indispensable, not because it is an infallible interpreter of God’s activity with human beings, but because it *is* that very activity.

---

<sup>6</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 153.

<sup>7</sup>Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 154.

<sup>8</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 151.

<sup>9</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 153.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

So this language, inseparable from the bodily movements of Christ himself, mediates the power of reconciliation, of healing (Luke 5:17; 6:19), viz., the power that effects salvation (Jas. 1:21). If indeed this Word—this *Logos*—is at once both the instantiation of *divine* reconciliatory power and genuine *human* language, then the dichotomy of power and language, the first being God’s movement out into the world in Christ, the second humanity’s proper reflection on that movement, is overcome. Theological discourse ceases to be a reflection upon and correction of that Christian practice that always seeks to be a more perfect imitation of Christ, and rather becomes located in Christ himself, and, more importantly, in Christ as he is at work in the world to reconcile all things to God. Thus, in embodying the event of genuine *theological* language,<sup>11</sup> the Word of Christ is itself *the* dynamic element of reconciliation, and as such, a transgression of the aporia between the power of reconciliation that rightly belongs to God alone and the inescapable mediation of human language.<sup>12</sup>

John Milbank has argued that this requires a substantiation of the belief that language, understood theologically, is *at once* both divine and human, or, more specifically, a *consubstantiation* of the human *logos* with the divine *Logos* as they are manifested in the body of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Here occurs *one* language, a language that is *spoken* in the incarnation of the divine *Logos*, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in Jesus Christ the spoken word, language itself, takes on sacramental significance; the word of Christ

<sup>11</sup>There is a profound significance to the idea that the *Ursprache* of Christ as the revelation of genuine *human* language is unequivocally *theological*, rather than merely ontological or metaphysical. Unless all reconciliatory language is fundamentally *theological*, then human language remains a powerful tool with which one can forcefully apprehend the other in the name of “reconciliation,” and, ultimately, apprehend God in the name of “salvation.” If our language is to be reconciliatory, however, “we shall have to divest of [its] original character the perhaps inevitable elements of a generally ‘metaphysical’ language structure, giving [it] a clear theological sense by placing [it] in a theological context. . . . For God—the living God who encounters us in Jesus Christ—is not such a one as can be appropriated by us in our own capacity. He is the One who will appropriate us, and in so doing permit and command and therefore adapt us to appropriate Him as well.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [CD], ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 187-88. See also John Milbank’s discussion in his essay “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” in *Word Made Strange*, 36-52.

<sup>12</sup>Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, 33.

<sup>13</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 134-39.



becomes a grace-mediating event of salvation, in which the power of God *is* that which is spoken, sent forth, let go by God in the embodiment of the reconciliatory event.<sup>14</sup> Nowhere is this more readily apparent than in the miracle accounts of Jesus in the Gospels,<sup>15</sup> in which the display of God's *dunamis* is inseparable from the words "your faith has saved you" (Luke 18:35-43; cf. Luke 7:36-50).<sup>16</sup> But this is a language spoken *by God* in Christ, and so the question becomes one of understanding how the *human* linguistic event can be seen as efficaciously *divine*. Can a genuinely linguistic, interpersonal ethic be uncovered that can both uphold and be informed by this theology of the Word made flesh?

This question is, once again, to be answered Christologically, for Christ is not merely the incarnated Word of divine-human reconciliation, but of inter-personal reconciliation as well. What the New Testament writers understood was that Jesus Christ was conceived linguistically, not merely because he was an event of intra-divine otherness, but primarily an event of inter-personal otherness.<sup>17</sup> It is thus *in Christ* that God is not only "reconciling the world to himself," but simultaneously "entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:19). *In Christ*, the human being speaks "as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pet. 4:11), for the *fully human* words are infused with the transformative, reconciliatory power of God spoken in the Word of Christ. This occasions an impossible dialectic: in a fully kenotic act, the eternal *Logos* has given himself to be marked by all the strictures of the finite human word, and yet speaks a word that retains the fullness of reconciliatory grace. By some miracle—*dunamis*—the mundane discourses of humanity have been transfigured down to their very roots, transformed into mediatory events of reconciliation, and are revealed to be a genuine incarnation of the divine Word. This miracle happens in the person of Jesus Christ, who is now, as Milbank has pointed out, no longer only the pre-originary condition for, but also the fulfillment of, all human language.<sup>18</sup> Only if Christ the *Logos* is the true fulfillment of all

<sup>14</sup>Grundmann, "Dunamai," 307-10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 301-303.

<sup>16</sup>This is true also in the story of the woman with bleeding in Luke 8:43-48, in which Jesus feels the power (*dunamin*) go out of him when he is infringed upon by the faithful touch of an Other, the hemorrhaging woman (8:46). The reconciliatory power that this touch evokes is confirmed by the words of Jesus: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (8:48).

<sup>17</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 177.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 139-42.

human discourse—the *logos*—can it then be positively asserted that no *word* will be impossible for God (Luke 1:37). In Christ, then, there is revealed an economy of reconciliation in which there are not *two* sets of communication, one divine, one human, in which the latter replicates the former. Rather, there is spoken *one* language, *one* communion, *one* perichoresis in which every event of reconciliation, both divine and human, participates.<sup>19</sup>

The question that this raises is obvious: *How* is the Christological event of reconciliation conceived? If this reconciliation is conceived linguistically, then *de facto* this reconciliation must be conceived *relationally*. Furthermore, to conceive of the Christological event of reconciliation relationally is to think this relationality in a distinctively trinitarian way.<sup>20</sup> This requires asking what it means to say that Christ, in an event of intra-trinitarian communication, is reconciled to God. If in fact, as Catherine Mowry LaCugna has suggested, it is true that through the miracle of human language “the intra-trinitarian self-communication [of God] is present in the world in a new way,”<sup>21</sup> then one must begin with the reconciliation of that human being in whose language such “intra-trinitarian self-communication” is most paradigmatically present. Indeed, to know God and his reconciliation through the *human* word of Jesus Christ is to know God and his reconciliation as they are in themselves.<sup>22</sup>

This communication, for Christ, is ultimately about obedience to the will of his Father; everywhere he goes, Jesus is not doing his own will, but the will of an Other, an Other who is himself God (Mark 14:36; John 5:30; 10:36-37; 14:31). For Christ, the first performative speech act is to *listen*, truly to *hear*, his Father, and in this hearing to obey him: a Greek prefix turns hearing into obedience; *akoue* becomes *hup-akoue*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, his is a

<sup>19</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 274.

<sup>20</sup>For a perceptive analysis of the implications of conceiving God linguistically and interpersonally for the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit in particular, see John Milbank’s discussion in the chapter entitled “The Second Difference” in *The Word Made Strange*, 171-93.

<sup>21</sup>LaCugna, *God For Us*, 220.

<sup>22</sup>See Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:410.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Gerhard Kittel, “*Akouo* [etc.],” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 1:223-24. As Kittel goes on to suggest, this has the effect of turning *word* into *action* (224).

speech that is first and foremost speech in response to an Other, speech which speaks in obedience to that Other, and is only genuine as speech that is fully open to the initiative of that Other. As Christ related to his followers, "I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. . . . What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me" (John 12:49-50).

It is not yet entirely apparent, however, how this process of obedient communication is intrinsic to reconciliation. It is, after all, this radical obedience that will ultimately lead to Christ's God-forsakenness on the cross. We move beyond this impasse, however, when we consider the initiatory, outgoing movement of God that is the Holy Spirit, for herein lies the *power* of Christ's speech to be the very Word of God.<sup>24</sup> Without this empowering movement of the Spirit, Christ is simply a "perfectly obedient Son who passes on the words of the Father;"<sup>25</sup> his speech remains a purely human utterance that does no more than merely testify to the divine. But when Christ's speech is seen as empowered by the movement of the Spirit, it is understood to be not simply the paradigmatic openness of the human to God, but, as such, the initiating movement of the power of God's Word as an openness to humanity. Christ's speech, empowered by the Holy Spirit, becomes a fully human and divine utterance, which, in its *one Word*, is the great possibility of all reconciliatory language. When the obedient speech of the Son, which by way of the rupture of the cross is fully dissociable from the Father, is found to be already inextricably bound to the Father through the power of the Spirit, an authentic discourse of reconciliation is engendered. Here there is no sundering of power and language, but rather the instantiation of a language that is in itself powerful only insofar as it is defined by this interpenetrative, perichoretic openness of the divine persons for one another, a *dynamic* openness wherein reconciliation is conceived not in terms of self-possession and control, but in terms of kenotic self-giving and obedience.

This is the initiative with which God confronts us in Christ, and this divine initiative sets forth the possibility of our own speech becoming reconciliatory. Here, then, in Christ, the *theological* consummation of inter-

---

<sup>24</sup>Here our previous statement that Christ *is* the power of God becomes explicitly trinitarian. Thus, we find that in the New Testament, *Christos*, *Pneuma*, and *dunamis* belong inseparably together. See Grundmann, "Dunamai," 301, 312.

<sup>25</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 177.

personal ethics is complete; inter-human reconciliation now demands the fully original initiative of divine reconciliation among us.<sup>26</sup> In essence, what is revealed in Christ and the economy of reconciliation that he embodies is a trinitarian movement whose discourse is none other than that discourse which at once both constitutes and arises out of God's solidarity with the world. Subsequently, the cross, as the epitome of this solidarity, is assumed to be the revelation of this discourse as it is most genuinely conceived. Furthermore, insofar as in his Eucharistic giving Christ opens himself out to the continual (non-identical) repetition of this event,<sup>27</sup> the cross itself, conceived Eucharistically,<sup>28</sup> becomes the linguistic touchstone for power and reconciliation in the ethical realm. I now appeal to the theology of John Wesley in an attempt to suggest that his way of understanding language in a Eucharistic vein presents us with the only proper context for such reconciliation to occur, viz., a communicative theology whose byword is love of God and neighbor as a continual openness to the initiative and needs of the Other.

### **John Wesley: The Eucharistic Site of Discourse**

Examining the theology of John Wesley from a discourse perspective proves to be, on the surface, highly problematic. On the one hand, Wesley's theology is itself decisively *oral* in its expression. Indeed, many of his sermons were written with the intent to be vocalized, and much of what we

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 135. As Milbank notes further, "this initiative is adequate because it has established a final representation in the incarnate *Logos*, and because it is adequate, it is ontologically unailing. Such a divine initiative among [human beings], however, can only be the full manifestation of the divine presence, because God's activity is at one with his being, and the manifestation of the divine presence automatically brings with it the realization, and so representation, of the true human *telos* within human history. . . . It is as this divine-human person . . . that we finally recognize in Jesus the divine overtaking and fulfilling of all human purposes. As the divine utterance, Jesus is the absolute origination of all meaning, but as human utterance Jesus is the inheritor of all already constituted meanings. He is a single utterance in his unified fulfillment of these meanings, such that he becomes the adequate metaphoric representation of the total human intent" (135-36).

<sup>27</sup>See *ibid.*, 141; David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 152-57.

<sup>28</sup>So it is that the cross must always be conceived Eucharistically, for by offering his broken body and shed blood in the bread and wine *prior to* his crucifixion, his death becomes diachronic, and thus fully repeatable in the *present* as a reconciliatory event. Cf. Catherine Pickstock, "Asyndeton: Syntax and Insanity. A Study in the Revision of the Nicene Creed," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 312-13.

know from the inner workings of his theology arises from his many conversations as recorded in his journals. It could be argued that even some of his more scholarly works, such as his *Notes on the New Testament*, are to be understood dialogically, insofar as they are written primarily to serve as aids for the *preacher*. However, the pervasively oral nature of Methodist communication, coupled with the movement's success among the working masses of England, have led many commentators to suggest that language, for Wesley, was simply another *powerful* means by which to perpetuate the ideals of the bourgeois elite, the ideological dreams of the Enlightenment, and the tyrannical measures of the monarchy.<sup>29</sup> The situation is made even more complicated when one considers that Wesley himself never set out to develop a systematic analysis of the manipulative powers of discourse and its role in the gospel message of reconciliation that the Methodist preachers so unabashedly proclaimed. Indeed, Wesley's communicative efforts were highly practical, and in many cases admittedly pragmatic as he explicated the gospel to those with whom he was speaking at any given time.<sup>30</sup>

However, an analysis of what Wesley does say about language, discourse, and communication within his amalgam of non-systematic texts reveals precisely the opposite of a manipulative, self-assertive language that seeks to win one over by the power and strength of its argument. Rather, Wesley's is a language that takes shape always and only in response to an Other, always and only in response to the audience with whom he is confronted. Hence, for Wesley, the speech acts in which the Christian is involved are to function as commissive and epideictic utterances that seek to adhere to a mode of life and thought in accordance with the reconciliatory Word spoken by God in Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> For Wesley, then, it was his duty, as a Christian act of self-kenotic love for the neighbor, to share the dialect of the people to whom he preached, to preach to the mass-

<sup>29</sup>E. P. Thompson, in his *The Making of the English Working Class*, expresses the sentiments shared by such critics of Methodist discourse: "Present-day manipulation of the masses by means of advertising and TV is nothing compared with the insidious indoctrination carried out by Methodism." E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pelican, 1991), 415. For a systematic response to the question "Was Methodist discourse manipulative?" in the negative, see Jean-Pierre van Noppen, *Transforming Words: The Early Methodist Revival From a Discourse Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 105-108 and *passim*.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 33-38.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-63.

es in a language fully commensurate with the language by which they had first addressed him. As far as his language was concerned, John Wesley claimed in the foreword to his *Sermons on Several Occasions* that:

Nothing here appears in an elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress . . . for now I write, as I generally speak, *ad populum*, to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking. . . . I design plain truth for plain people. . . . I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life. . . . I dare no more write in a fine style than wear a fine coat. But were it otherwise . . . I should purposely decline, what many admire, an highly ornamental style.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, such language was Wesley's way of being "all things to all people" by meeting the poor on their own ground, practicing abundant charity, and offering them a message of hope.<sup>33</sup>

Such inter-personal, communicative ethics as is found in Wesley's Methodism had its origin in yet a more fundamentally linguistic event of reconciliation, namely, that of communion between God and humanity as it is presented in the reconciliatory Word of Jesus Christ. Indeed, human communication as it takes place between persons is analogous to the communication by which the Word of Christ effects reconciliation theologically.<sup>34</sup> In describing this reconciliatory communication between God and humanity, Wesley's language is explicitly trinitarian:

The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly "witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God"; that Jesus Christ hath loved

---

<sup>32</sup>John Wesley, preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 5:1-2.

<sup>33</sup>van Noppen, *Transforming Words*, 20.

<sup>34</sup>Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 63. This is, of course, an *analogia fidei* established by the initiatory revelation of God in the Word of Christ. As Barth understands it, the *Logos* "can find force and expression only in the shipwreck of their [human beings'] words, conferring suitability upon their words, which are impotent as such." Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:221. Cf. Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, 150, 154.

me, and given himself for me; that all of my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.<sup>35</sup>

For Wesley, the whole of salvation is an *event of communication* between God and humanity, a *trinitarian* event that makes all reconciliation, both theological and ethical, possible;<sup>36</sup> it is an event of *constant communion* with the trinitarian God.<sup>37</sup> It is only insofar as our language, our conversation with the neighbor, is grounded in this initiatory event of reconciliatory communication that our words, our conversation, for Wesley, become a genuine means of effecting this reconciliation. Furthermore, as we find ourselves *obedient* to the Word of God, obedient in such a way that we hear toward, listen to, and linguistically respond to the Word of God that addresses us in Christ, we find ourselves at that very moment listening to the voice of the neighbor, and responding to that voice with an event of God-given, graceful language of reconciliation.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit, I [1746]," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>36</sup>Runyon, *New Creation*, 53.

<sup>37</sup>John Wesley, "The New Creation [1785]," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 500. "[W]e may observe there is a kind of order wherein God himself is generally pleased to use these means in bringing a sinner to salvation. . . . Having now a desire to flee from the wrath to come, [one] purposely goes to *hear* how it may be done. . . . [One] begins also to *talk* of the things of God . . . yea, and to talk with God, to *pray* to him. . . . And thus [one] continues in God's way—in hearing, reading, meditating, and partaking of the Lord's Supper—till God, in the manner that pleases him, speaks to [the] heart, 'Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.' By observing this order of God we may learn what means to recommend to any particular soul. If any of these will reach a stupid, careless sinner, it is probably *hearing* or *conversation*." Idem, "The Means of Grace [1746]," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 168-69.

<sup>38</sup>This is only true for Wesley insofar as the word "obedience" is understood to function according to its etymological origin ("Obedience is from the Latin *ob* + *audio*, to hear toward, to give ear to, or to hearken." Runyon, *New Creation*, 236), in which the voice of another—God—is ultimate and primary in our linguistic and embodied response: "But obedience is the continuing openness to welcome life from the creative source, to receive love, justice, mercy, and truth from God, and, as the image of God, to *exercise and communicate further what we have received*" (18; emphasis added). Furthermore, "'Disobedience' is not simply disobeying a rule, as the Genesis story might seem to imply. It is getting out of earshot, turning away from the relationship for which humans were created" (20).

Such reconciliatory communication happens for Wesley, on both the theological and ethical levels, as an *embodied orality*, and nowhere is this more evident than in his meditations on the role of the Eucharist in the life of the human being. In his sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion,” Wesley takes obedience to Christ’s imperative “Do this in remembrance of me” in regards to partaking of the bread and wine to mean that the service of the sacrament is to become pervasive of the Christian’s life; the Christian life is *constantly* to be lived in a decidedly sacramental way.<sup>39</sup> This means that the sacramental nature of the Eucharist, for Wesley, extends beyond the typically pietistic, individualized notion of partaking for the sake of saving one’s own soul, and that the life lived Eucharistically facilitates reconciliatory interpersonal relations and social renewal.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Wesley seeks to move beyond the limited understanding of communion as an isolated act by suggesting that the Eucharist is not simply a means of *receiving* the power of God’s reconciliatory grace, but is simultaneously an event of *giving* oneself as a grateful and thus *graceful* response.<sup>41</sup> Where this active-passivity on behalf of the communicant is absent, for Wesley, the Eucharist is no longer a truly reconciliatory event. On the other hand, where the Eucharist is seen to be not only passively epicletic, but actively commissive as well, ensuring that the entirety of one’s life will be expressive of this service of thanksgiving and praise, it becomes a means of not only divine-human reconciliation, but paradigmatic of interpersonal reconciliation as well.

Fundamental to its being at once both an event of divine-human and inter-personal reconciliation is Wesley’s understanding of the Eucharist as being primarily *communicative* or *linguistic*. The Eucharist, for Wesley, is first of all an event of communication between the human being and God; such communication is a means by which the human being is open to God, actively waiting on the transforming work of his grace.<sup>42</sup> Such communicative openness on the part of the human being is the genuine response

---

<sup>39</sup>John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion” [1787], in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 502-510.

<sup>40</sup>Runyon, *New Creation*, 127. See also Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 202-205.

<sup>41</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 205.

<sup>42</sup>Wesley, “Means of Grace,” 165.



to the prior address of the Word of God; the language of the Eucharist is the human being's obedient (keeping before us the linguistic etymological history of this word) response to "hearing the gospel word": "Sinners, obey the gospel word / Haste to the supper of my Lord!," sang the Wesleys.<sup>43</sup> By defining the sacrament as a means of communicatively *being open* to God, Wesley makes a fundamental shift in understanding the location of reconciliatory power in the Eucharist. The power lies not in our openness, but rather in the *power of God* to which we are laid bare in our waiting on him.<sup>44</sup> This power, moreover, is a power by which God is free to enter into the conversation through the elements of the bread and wine; as such, *the Spirit brings Christ to us* and the power of God is thus at work in these means to effect genuine reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> Hence, for Wesley, to communicate with God in the Eucharist is to be open to God in such a way that the

<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship With One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 108.

<sup>44</sup>"Whosoever . . . imagines there is any intrinsic *power* in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing . . . the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord's Supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him . . ." (Wesley, "Means of Grace," 160). Cf. the words of the seventeenth-century pietist William Nicholson in Runyon, *New Creation*, 130-31: "Now if it be demanded how so small a piece of bread, or a spoonful of wine, can produce this effect? . . . it proceeds not from the elements, but from the will and power of Christ, who ordained these to be means and instruments for that end. They remain in substance what they were; but in relation to him are more. It is spiritual bread and spiritual wine . . . not so much because spiritually received, but because being so received, it causes us to receive the Spirit, and *by the power of the Spirit* . . . be enabled to do all things" (emphasis added).

<sup>45</sup>This image of Christ coming "down" to us by the power of the Spirit in the Eucharist is a reversal by Wesley of the popular Calvinist notion that through the Eucharist we are taken "up" into Christ: "According to Calvin, by *virtue* (power) of the Spirit, our souls are joined to Christ, raised up to heaven where he is at the right hand of the Father. . . . However, in Wesley's understanding *the direction is reversed*. Rather than our thoughts rising to Christ in heaven, *the Spirit brings Christ to us*, expressing the grace and love of God toward us through the means of bread and wine" (Runyon, *New Creation*, 129-30). Calvin, in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, states: "Meanwhile, we must be ever reaching upward, and let us remember . . . that the sacraments are not instituted to detain us here below, but rather to draw us towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Quoted in François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 353-54. Cf. John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.17, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1359-1428 *passim*.

power of God through the Spirit is at work to make the Word of Christ truly present in this event of communication, and thus to instill the partaking of these elements with a truly reconciliatory reality.

If for Wesley the Eucharist is an occasion for divine-human reconciliatory conversation, it is just as much an event of inter-personal communication. Commenting on the Love Feast, a particularly Methodist way of Eucharistic participation, Wesley says, “The very design of the lovefeast is free and familiar *conversation*, in which every man, yea, every woman, has liberty to *speak* what ever may be to the glory of God.”<sup>46</sup> Understanding the Eucharist in this way, human language, for Wesley, itself takes on sacramental, reconciliatory significance as a “means of grace.”<sup>47</sup> But the language with which we converse with one another is the language with which we converse with God. Stated another way, to say that the Eucharist is a mode of conversation in which we are open to the power of God, is to say that this is a mode of conversation in which we are open to the desires and needs of the neighbor, the Other. Consequently, Wesley says, as you are gathered around the table,<sup>48</sup> “let your conversation be ‘to the use of edifying’; calculated to edify either the speaker or the hearers or both; to build them up, *as each has particular need*, either in faith, or love, or holiness.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it is by way of this Eucharistic *conversing* that our discourse “ministers grace to the hearers.”<sup>50</sup> As such, our speech, our conversation, is reconciliatory insofar as it is open to the needs of the Other, insofar as it is open to a power beyond itself and believes that, if this speech is genuinely a response of love to the prior address of the poor and destitute

---

<sup>46</sup>John Wesley, Journal for July 19, 1761, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 3:68.

<sup>47</sup>To say that our language can be sacramental is to keep before us the Wesleyan definition of sacrament as a “means of grace” laid out above; this is not to say that our words convert, for Wesley, but rather that they can be a *means* whereby one is reconciled to God and neighbor. See the perceptive discussion on the efficacy of the sacraments in Wainwright, *Worship With One Accord*, 112-13.

<sup>48</sup>For Wesley, this term “table” is always Eucharistic, even if what is meant by it is the table to which one is invited by the neighbor for a friendly dinner, for even here genuine reconciliatory conversation is happening. See John Wesley, “The More Excellent Way” [1787], in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 517-18.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 517 (emphasis added).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 518.

Other, the power of God is at work there to effect an authentic event of inter-personal reconciliation.

With this linguistic, conversationalist understanding of the Eucharist occurring on both theological and ethical levels, Wesley turns the traditional notions of power and language on their heads. Eucharistic language is not a means of powerfully asserting oneself, but rather of relinquishing power; in giving the initiative, the benefit of the first word to the Other, Wesley ensures that such power structures are undone, that our language is not a propriety of power, but rather a gift of power, a power that always and only comes from an Other. Furthermore, by asserting that the Eucharist is a linguistic event in precisely this vein, Wesley ensures that reconciliatory grace is truly *free*, free as “the gift and the work of God,” a grace for which we wait precisely by employing this means of Eucharistic language.<sup>51</sup> As such, Wesley gives us a theory of language that is decisively Other-centric, and is ethically reconciliatory in this Other-centeredness precisely because it is first and foremost *Christo-centric*, always and only contextualized within the already-spoken Word of God, a Word for whom reconciliatory power is dynamically intrinsic. As such, Wesley’s communicative theology moves us beyond the impasse of theological language as mere reflection and opens up the possibility of inscribing within this language the marks of Eucharistic solidarity. It is to the formal structures of this language that we turn our final attention.

### **Speaking Gracefully: Re-inscribing the Eucharist in Language**

In his communicative understanding of the Eucharist, Wesley has presented us with a “dialogic dynamic”<sup>52</sup> with which to understand the role of the human word in the economy of reconciliation. With this reading of Wesley, coupled with our meditation on the trinitarian discourse of language and power in the person and work of Christ, we are now in a position to explicate a truly Other-centered (because Christ-centered) theology of ethical, reconciliatory language. Our reflections to this point have shown that, if its language is to be truly reconciliatory, theology must seek for something other than abstract reflectivity as the basis for critical consciousness. This can be nothing other than the Christian practice of the

---

<sup>51</sup>Wesley, “Means of Grace,” 161.

<sup>52</sup>See Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 196-197.

Eucharist, for here is revealed a non-identically repeatable language that is at once both divine and human and is patterned by an event of reconciliation that is intensely bodily, reaching the apex of solidarity with both God and the world. In saying this, we are affirming not only Wesley's assertion that language—communication—*administers* the sacrament as a "means of grace," but ultimately that the Eucharist itself underlies all genuine language,<sup>53</sup> thereby inscribing human language with the power of its reconciliatory dynamic.

The difficulty that this assertion creates is obvious: it is to risk passing off language itself as a *tertium quid*, a middle-ground, a point of continuity between God and humanity,<sup>54</sup> in which all human language claims the inherent capacity to effect on some level the power of reconciliation. Champions of the *analogia entis* have often made this assertion, but to do so is to dissociate the human event of language from its proper context within the Word of God in Christ, and to suggest that some meaning adheres to human words prior to and apart from the revelation of Christ as the condition of all language. No thinker within the past century has been more keenly perceptive of this danger than Karl Barth:

Our words are not our property, but His. . . . We use our words improperly and pictorially—as we can now say, looking back from God's revelation—when we apply them within the confines of what is appropriate to us as creatures. When we apply them to God they are not alienated from their original object and therefore from their truth, but, on the contrary, restored to it. . . . Now it certainly does not lie *in our power* to return our words to their proper use. . . . In His revelation God controls His property, elevating our words to their proper use, giving Himself to be their proper object, and therefore giving them truth.<sup>55</sup>

The criterion for our words to be reconciliatory, according to Barth, lies not in some power inherent within language itself; the scope of human language is certainly too narrow and finite for an assertion such as that. Rather, the criterion lies in the power of God himself to take up his dwelling in this narrowness, to make this finiteness his own, and to allow

---

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>54</sup>Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, 18.

<sup>55</sup>Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:229-30 (emphasis added).

his Word to be the sole condition for our speech.<sup>56</sup> The first move that must be made, then, in laying out a theology of language that functions ethically within an inter-personal economy of reconciliation is to relinquish all claims to human language mediating an inherent power, and to affirm that *every* event of human discourse, if it is to be truly reconciliatory, must be released from our controlling grasp and come completely under the power of God.<sup>57</sup>

This, however, is precisely that which makes human Eucharistic language *impossible*, for such language is neither autonomously in command of itself nor is it an objective instrument controlled by some bare, manipulative power.<sup>58</sup> It is rather that Eucharistic language is at once both a gift *from* God and a sacrifice *to* God,<sup>59</sup> an active-passivity that paradoxically renders the human word at once both incapable of mediating reconciliation and yet infinitely responsible for it. This paradox places the human word at a veritably untraversable distance from the Word of God, and yet still

---

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 212. Thus the position of Jean-Luc Marion, who seems to be at once both Barthian and Heideggerian in his treatment of language: “To do theology is not to speak the language of god or of ‘God,’ but to let the Word speak us (or make us speak) in the way that it speaks of and to Gxd. . . . [F]or in order to say Gxd one first must let oneself be said by him to the point that, by this docile abandon, Gxd speaks in our speech, just as in the words of the Word sounded the unspeakable Word of his Father. It is not a question, for the ‘theologian,’ of reaching that which discourse speaks . . . of Gxd, but of abandoning discourse and every linguistic initiative to the Word. . . . The theologian lets [herself] say (or be said by) the Word, or rather lets the Word let [her] speak human language in the way that Gxd speaks it in his Word.” Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 143-44. I should explain that Marion has an “x” or a cross of St. Andrew over the “o” of God: the cross that crosses out the nought, at least in English.

<sup>57</sup>See Barth, *CD*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (1960), pt. 3:153-54. In arguing for the deity of the Son, Athanasius employed precisely this powerless capacity of human words to assert the powerful efficacy of the divine Word as spoken in Christ: “And [humanity’s] word is composed of syllables, and neither lives nor operates anything, but is only significant of the speaker’s intentions, and does but go forth and go by, no more to appear, since it was not at all before it was spoken; wherefore the word of [humanity] neither lives nor operates anything, nor in short is [a human being]. . . . And [humanity’s] words avail not for operation. . . . But the ‘Word of God,’ as the Apostle says, ‘*is living and powerful*’ . . . .” Athanasius *Four Discourses Against the Arians* ii.34-35, trans. John Henry Newman, rev. Archibald Robertson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), 367 (emphasis added).

<sup>58</sup>Pickstock, *After Writing*, 176.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

maintains the impotence of the human word apart from its grounding *in* the divine Word. This aporia is resolved, however, in the person of Christ, whose resurrection ensures that those things that are impossible for human beings will be possible for God (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27). Because the event of Christ's cross and resurrection reveals a God whose very opening up of himself to the distance of utter abandonment is itself a movement of reconciliation, one can positively assert that the very admission of distance from God that occurs as one attempts to speak Eucharistically permits a genuine proximity with God. This allows maintaining, along with Barth, that in the economy of reconciliation the *human* word *miraculously* testifies to and is *empowered* by the divine Word.<sup>60</sup> But this claim is only possible where human language is *continually* reinscribed by the Eucharistic *Logos*, and thus where such language is always identified solely by the non-identically repeatable marks of this *Logos*: unmitigated openness and vulnerability, bodily displacement, and extreme gratitude.

**1. Vulnerability.** If the cross of Christ is the instantiation of kenosis *par excellence*, the epitome of vulnerability and openness, so the Eucharist is that event by which the human being offers the body in a dispossessing act of language. To speak this language is to speak a language that is intensely vulnerable,<sup>61</sup> open to the neighbor with a kind of precariousness that can only be reconciliatory insofar as it is empowered by a Word beyond its own. This is to suggest that we need not have a conceptual "grasp" of our words for them to be reconciliatory.<sup>62</sup> To maintain the

<sup>60</sup>Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:116; cf. Pickstock, *After Writing*, 178.

<sup>61</sup>"It is in [her] spoken word that [humanity], like God, comes out into the open, making [itself] clear, intelligible and in some way responsible, venturing forth and binding and committing [itself]. In [her] word [the human being] hazards [herself]. And it is demanded of [her] that in [her] word [she] shall continually hazard [herself] to God's glory, coming out into the open as a partisan of God." Barth, *CD*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. A. T. Mackay et. al. (1961), pt. 4:75.

<sup>62</sup>See Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Liturgy and Kenosis," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 254-55. As José Comblin reports, this truth has had a liberating effect on the language of the poor in Latin America: "They know that their own words are worthy of God because they have learned God's words. . . . They have learned not to worry about their grammatical mistakes, not to be ashamed of the way they speak, to use words they know and to apply them to serious subjects. They no longer accept that speech is the exclusive property of the powerful." José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 27.

necessity of such a conceptual grasp would be tantamount to offering a philosophy of language based on a kind of knowledge-power that asserts that the best orators are the best mediators, and hence are best suited for fostering reconciliation between two parties. This would appear to be, once again, a retreat into the objectivity of reflection where effective language is marked by security and closure. Each such event of closure becomes its own self-enclosed playing field and stakes its claim as one more language game among others, games whose playing fields certainly overlap, but whose boundaries remain intact. However, to contrast such closure and security with the vulnerability and openness of the body of Christ is to aver that Eucharistic language is more than simply one more human language game among others.<sup>63</sup> Rather, it is appropriately a *divine* discourse that irrupts into and breaks apart human speech<sup>64</sup> by means of its own genuinely *human* openness and vulnerability—the Word of Christ. In ordaining the repeatability of this discourse through his Eucharistic self-giving, Christ thus makes it possible for human beings, by way of such openness and vulnerability, to speak the true language of this reconciliation.

Such openness and vulnerability, moreover, is not for one's own sake, but for the sake of the Other, the neighbor. St. Paul's focus on his own weaknesses and inabilities is linked with an understanding of himself as completely *for* the Other; his sufferings were not simply an appropriation of Christ's death in order to make possible his own passage unto life, but rather were *for the life of the Other*.<sup>65</sup> "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake" (Col. 1:24), says Paul, who elsewhere affirms that, as Christians, "we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:11-12). It is by means of such bodily openness and vulnerability that we "make the word of God fully known" (Col. 1:25). Conceived linguistically, then, this is to let one's communication be patterned (and therefore spoken) by the Word of God uttered in Christ, to relinquish one's right to the first word (and the last word), and to allow one's speech to be reconciliatory insofar as it is offered as a graceful response to the address of the Other. Even then we are to remember that the criterion

---

<sup>63</sup>Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Aesthetics: The Theological Sublime," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 215.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 151.

for the truth of reconciliation remains, as it was for Christ, the *Spirit* of God, who transforms one's inarticulate words into "means of grace."<sup>66</sup> In these words, words which arise from a stammering language whose very nature it is to falter, there is no self-assertion, no formation of an identity by which one becomes the ultimate reconciler. For in this language "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). Here, as we are situated *in* the openness and vulnerability that we can appropriately call the Word of Christ, we are *for* the Other in a dynamic event of reconciliation.

**2. Bodily Displacement.** This leads naturally to the second mark of human language as it is inscribed Eucharistically, namely, bodily displacement. This Christ that we proclaim is one whose body is broken and whose blood is shed, one whose ultimate event of language is his bodily displacement on a cross. To have one's language be a proclamation of *this* Christ is to find oneself spoken as an embodied displacement in response to the initiatory command of Jesus to "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). By making possible the performance and reperformance of his bodily displacement in the Eucharist, Christ puts forth this bodily kenosis as that which constructs human language in every event of reconciliation;<sup>67</sup> if one's language is to be reconciliatory, it must be marked by this kind of embodied orality.

To be sure, every event of language is itself intrinsically physical; it is about breathing, vocal chords, tongues, lips, and ears; it takes up the whole body into the rhythmic patterns of its syllabic movements.<sup>68</sup> But when the physicality of language is defined by the displaced body of Christ, then it is marked by a heterocentric embodiment, an embodiment that finds itself *displaced* in permanent concern for the Other.<sup>69</sup> Such an *embodied* understanding of language, conceived Eucharistically, precludes the reduction of theology to the level of mere reflective words, but rather witnesses to the translocation of Christ's own body into our words.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup>LaCugna, *God For Us*, 381.

<sup>67</sup>Graham Ward, "Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>68</sup>Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 124.

<sup>69</sup>Pickstock, *After Writing*, 229.

<sup>70</sup>See Ward, "Bodies," 167-68.



Subsequently, this is also a re-inscribing of his word *within* our bodies. This is of paramount importance, for Christ knows all too well, through the history of his own bodily displacement—incarnation and circumcision, transfiguration, Eucharist, crucifixion, resurrection<sup>71</sup>—that reconciliation is only effected through the transgression of boundaries, physical boundaries that can only properly be transgressed *bodily*. Thus, the linguistic instantiation of the Eucharistic bread and wine as *his* (Christ's) body and blood make reconciliation possible only as a continual re-embodiment of these words—it is *my* body that is now displaced in this event of language.

Genuine reconciliatory language, then, must become what Gustavo Gutiérrez has termed a “dialogue by deeds;”<sup>72</sup> it must be a language of reconciliation that is spoken by our bodies, by the giving of our lives to the neighbor in an act of concrete, material solidarity with the Other. As Gutiérrez goes on to say, “Deeds speak for themselves. Paradoxically, words of themselves do not.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, to be open and vulnerable in such a way that we truly *hear* the Word is to find ourselves *living* this Word (Jas. 1:22-25), and as we live this Word, genuine reconciliatory language can be at work. If I am going to speak a word of genuine reconciliation, it can only be a material, concrete speech in which I respond to the call of the Other by offering “the bread from my mouth and the coat off my back,” to paraphrase Jesus' mandate from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38-42; Luke 6:29-30). This displaced embodiment leaves one emptied, kenotically undone, wherein her true *pleroma*, true fullness, lies in an excessive, kenotic desire to fulfill the needs of the Other.<sup>74</sup> Such desire for the Other, understood bodily, is a *gift* in the face of the Other's demand. And since there is no gift outside the continually *given* Eucharistic body of Christ, our embodied orality, insofar as it remains a gift as such, mediates the

<sup>71</sup>For a cogent and erudite discussion of the human body from the perspective of these events of Christ's own bodily displacement, see *ibid.*, 163-81.

<sup>72</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 159-62.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>74</sup>“Affected by the Infinite, desire cannot proceed to an end which it would be equal to; in desire the approach distances, and enjoyment is but the increase of hunger. . . . This can only be if the desirable orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence—the other. The reference to the other is an awakening, an awakening to proximity, and this is responsibility for the neighbor, to the point of substituting for [the neighbor].” Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” trans. Richard A. Cohen and Alphonso Lingis, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 178.

divine power of reconciliation. So it is that our words, as open to the needs of the Other, “give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29).

**3. Extreme Gratitude.** Such “gift talk” gives way to the third indispensable element of a genuinely reconciliatory theology of language, namely, extreme gratitude. In an authentically heterocentric ethic of reconciliation, gratitude is *the* primary event of reconciliatory language. This is for two interrelated reasons. It is here, first, that our speech is particularized as a gratuitous *response* to the call of the Other. When one remembers that the veracity of the human proclamation arises from the fact that God in Christ has spoken first, then authentic human speaking is found to happen always and only in this event of responsive gratitude.<sup>75</sup> This occurs not simply on the theologically divine-human level, but simultaneously at the inter-personal level as well, because the voice of Jesus Christ is contextually particularized in the voice of our neighbor.<sup>76</sup> Thus, David Ford has suggested that the author of Ephesians understands gratitude as an ethical event of communication.<sup>77</sup> The words of Ephesians 5:18-21 are paradigmatic of this idea:

[B]e filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Being *obedient* to one another in the fear of Christ. (author’s translation)

Insofar as being “filled with the Spirit” is synonymous with being “empowered” by God, these verses invite us to a new economy of power.<sup>78</sup> It is subjection to one another through the address of gratitude in the name of Christ, “who loved us and gave himself up for us” (5:2). In gratitude, then, language is finally not about self-assertion but self-dispossession; it is not about speaking in axiomatic relation to one’s own reflective self, but in relation to the Other, the Other whose initiatory word has evoked our response of thanks, or, more appropriately, *grace*.<sup>79</sup> Every event of reconciliatory language is always and only a gift, a gift that comes from an

---

<sup>75</sup>Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:219.

<sup>76</sup>See Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 175-76.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 108-10.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>79</sup>Gratitude “does not have its necessity in itself; it does not happen on its own account; but it is evoked by an object.” Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:216.

Other, and thus can only arise as one is found to be in solidarity with this Other.

Thus, a second reason for why gratitude is the epitome of pure reconciliatory speech lies in the fact that it is simply *pure gift*, a gift whose linguistic embodiment comes in the form of *continuing to listen, giving one's ear to the Other as an event of obedient, reconciliatory language*.<sup>80</sup> When one speaks in this way—gratuitously—one gives up all claims to having to speak *for* something, as if one's speech were always self-referent and achieved reconciliation insofar as it served to convince the Other of the veracity of the speaker's own self-aggrandized ideal. On the contrary, in giving up any such claim, one's speech is, to paraphrase Martin Heidegger, "of that speaking which does not have to speak for something, but only speaks for being allowed to speak."<sup>81</sup> Karl Barth, in commenting on the work of the famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, illustrates how his music captures the essence of such gratuitous language:

Mozart's music is not, in contrast to that of Bach, a message, and not, in contrast to that of Beethoven, a personal confession. He does not reveal in his music any doctrine and certainly not himself. . . . Mozart does not wish to *say* anything: he just sings and sounds. Thus he does not force anything on the listener, does not demand that [the listener] make any decisions or take any positions. . . . Nor does he *will* to proclaim the praise of God. He just does it.<sup>82</sup>

Here is a speaking that is genuinely *graceful* simply because it is a speech that is wholly *grateful*; it receives speech as a gift, and as such *it gives*.

## Conclusions

All of this, of course, turns on our obedience to the imperative "Do this!" as uttered by Christ in the original event of the breaking of the bread

---

<sup>80</sup>See John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena To a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995): 149.

<sup>81</sup>Heidegger's original words were actually offered in reference to the act of gratitude itself: "Of that thanking which does not have to thank for something, but only thanks for being allowed to thank" (Martin Heidegger, *Discourse On Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966], 85), a thanking which finds its proper context in waiting, a being released toward that "from whence we are called" (90).

<sup>82</sup>Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 37-38.

and the pouring out of the wine.<sup>83</sup> In Luke's account of the Last Supper, this imperative immediately follows the words "This is my body, which is given for you" (22:19). The "do this" for Luke thus becomes the archimedean point of both the receptivity of gratitude and the giving of bodily displacement. In other words, it is by virtue of receiving this body in gratitude as a gift from God that we are taken up into this body—this Word—as an ethical instantiation of this gift. In receiving this gift, we do not then possess it as if it were a thing, for such would seem to be yet another attempt at the transferral or the appropriation of power. Rather we "must in turn bequeath ourselves, for we are part of that body we receive."<sup>84</sup>

Where obedience to this imperative is understood to be an incorporation into the body of Christ itself, then the Eucharistic event no longer exceeds language, as if our words were meant to be the disembodied signifier of some distant, non-repeatable extra-linguistic signified we call the cross of Christ. Rather, our words "lose themselves in God," to borrow a phrase from John Wesley; they "die in God, by a deep gratitude."<sup>85</sup> This death is not inappropriately called the death of language as reflection, for in obedience to the Eucharistic "do this" of Christ there emerges such an embodied integration of word and action that the Eucharist is *inscribed in our language*, a language that is itself inscribed in the openness of our actions to the Other. Accordingly, the dynamic of reconciliation becomes an event of relational *communication* rather than an objective or visible "thing" requiring theological interpretation or commentary. In consequence, we are no longer distanced by language from the power of God as revealed in the economy of reconciliation, but rather we are witnesses to that power in every word we speak.

---

<sup>83</sup>Throughout the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper, this imperative takes on a multitude of expressions. Matthew has: "Take, eat" (26:26), "Drink" (26:27). Mark has: "Take" (14:22). Luke has: "Take . . . divide" (22:17), "Do this" (22:19). Paul has: "Do this" (1 Cor. 11:24), "Do this" (11:25). Interestingly enough, John's imperative stems not from the eating and drinking of the feast itself, but from an act of bodily service performed by Jesus following the meal, the washing of the disciples' feet: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (13:14).

<sup>84</sup>Pickstock, *After Writing*, 263.

<sup>85</sup>John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 112-13.

# DISFIGURING HARMONY: RECONCILIATION, MARK C. TAYLOR, AND POSTMODERN THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

by

Kenton M. Stiles

My first sustained thoughts on reconciliation occurred while I was a divinity school student living in a racially charged Midwestern city. Ironically, my reflection was stimulated by the unreality of television rather than the painfully real discrimination and violence that blighted our metropolitan area on a daily basis. Appearing on my screen for a period of many months were a series of public service announcements intended to raise consciousness of social differences and encourage agents for unifying change. In each advertisement a famous television personality spoke directly to the camera, but their words of reconciliation—sometimes profound, sometimes cliché—were soon forgotten. The ad campaign's theme and the closing sound bite was more memorable: "Harmony in a World of Difference." Only much later did I realize the phrase's theological significance: aesthetic contrast and unity are essential to reconciliation.

Our oxymoronic title, "Disfiguring Harmony," may seem more like a Buddhist *koan* than an adequate Christian definition of reconciliation. To suggest that ugliness and beauty should be categorized together under the lofty ideal of reconciliation is much like the sound of one hand clapping: more than puzzling, it is *nonsense*. What we know about these two words and our subject seems so clear to us, for to disfigure is to destroy what is beautiful, to bring cacophony to what is harmonious, to wound and scar that which is attractive. To reconcile, on the other hand, is to heal the

injuries done by those who do damage and to bring together people at enmity and repair the rift between them. Reconciliation is the radical overcoming of disfiguring evil by harmonious good—this is what Christians believe! God forgives sinners, heals the sick, and restores the downtrodden; God’s people release the past, overcome prejudices, and learn to love anew. Reconciliation as disfigured harmony? Pure nonsense!

The puzzle posed by our titular word-game nevertheless remains. Although it is true that reconciliation *involves* both disfiguring and harmony, this observation does not venture far enough into the depths of reconciliation. To say that reconciliation *is* disfiguring harmony is to state the thesis for this study, for “is” discloses an underlying and irresolvable tension that binds these terms together. While my primary creative intent for this study is to unveil an original image of reconciliation with the medium of postmodern theological aesthetics, finding special inspiration in four themes that Mark C. Taylor develops in *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (1992), I will begin by sketching a general outline of our topic and my methods.

### **Fingering Reconciliation**

Countless discussions—including many unproductive ones—of noble topics begin with a definition taken from a dictionary. Ours depends upon it. *Reconciliation*, we find, is both the act and result of reaching a new settlement, achieving a new harmony, or creating a new assembly. To *reconcile* means “to bring together” or “to harmonize.” From the Latin word *concilium* we infer that it is to once again gather together a council to achieve new counsel. But before we can figure out how reconciliation *is* disfigured harmony, we must first finger out (i.e., point to) certain members (i.e., constituent parts) of reconciliation, postmodern aesthetics, and certain theological presuppositions relevant to this task. Literally speaking, reconciliation begins with finger-pointing (reconcile: *re-*, “back, again” or “against” + *con-*, “with” or “against” + *cilia-*, “finger, appendage”). The fingers point back and forth, individually and collectively, repeating the repetitive, coordinating their appendages. But to whom and where do the fingers point—at individuals, institutions, or to the heavens? Perhaps they point at myself, for as an educated, North American, Caucasian male I am certainly a member of one of the world’s guiltiest classes of oppressors. Hopefully they point at the Other, those helpless and harassed persons who wait for liberation from the social, economic, political, or religious tyrant-

nies that enslave them and for the power to preserve new autonomy. The fingers will definitely point to courses of action that lead away from discrimination and toward a unity that preserves differences rather than sublimating or subduing them. Having now made these points, we now turn to the first topic upon which we must touch in this preliminary investigation of reconciliation.

Reconciliation, as defined by this study, is disfiguring harmony. Ultimately, we will discover that disfiguring itself *is* reconciliation as an active type of harmonizing that continually (re)presents and plays forth reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> Yet we must also emphasize that “disfigure” and “harmony” are contrasting realities that are absolutely necessary to each other at every moment—past, present, and future—within the historical processes of reconciliation. Reconciliation emerges from—and in spite of—tragic histories. These histories and their effects remain with us whether or not we are able to forget them. In truth, it is better to remember the disfigured past since it provides reference points by which one evaluates present situations. It is logically impossible to say that life has more value *now* or that the situation is better or more beautiful *than before* without also remembering the past. The disfiguring of the past also reminds us what to avoid in the future. Some events, like the Crusades, Inquisition, Holocaust, and African-American enslavement do not just remind, they *demand*: we will not allow this to happen ever again! As both a reference point and a warning, the past affects the present and, in turn, the future.

For reconciliation to have strength and provide satisfaction in the present, disfiguring and harmony must appear simultaneously. In order to

---

<sup>1</sup>As the structure of the title “Disfiguring Harmony” indicates, although harmony may parallel reconciliation, it is not congruent to it. Rather, “disfiguring” is a modifying adjective, and is thus a specific type of harmony relevant to reconciliation. Disfiguring is therefore not the opposite of harmony. Rather, within the active, to-and-fro process of reconciliation, harmony and antipathy stand as the opposing “polarities”—I hesitate to use this word since it is part of the ontotheological vocabulary which Taylor seeks to undermine—and disfiguring constitutes a *via media* that, in its playing forth, *is* reconciliation. *Via media* is a traditional label for a synthetic theological method—a “middle way” that brings together opposites to create a unified whole. Taylor rejects such unities, however, for they can only come from within a dyadic structuring of reality. While it seems impossible to me to preserve the notion of true difference without utilizing differentiating structures like dyads, with deference to Taylor’s method of “erring,” a mental dance played between the very poles that he seeks to deny (!), I suggest an alternate definition for *via media*: “a middling way.” To “middle” is to muddle in the midst, hemming and hawing betwixt and between, in a manner that is ultimately pleasing.

better understand their dialectic presence in the present, we may consider the language of process philosophy, which can provide one aesthetic framework upon which to build our thesis. Process thought views life as a creative adventure ordered by the goal of beauty, moving from the diversity of manyness to the ever-increasing unity of harmony. Likewise, reconciliation moves toward its goal of a beauty or harmony in which unity does not override individual differences. Difference is absolutely necessary in the process metaphysic: without difference, progress and life itself cannot occur. The activity that brings vitality and lasting harmony to life can only be achieved through the active play of “ideal opposites,” necessarily related and contrasting partners such as God/world, good/evil, and harmony/discord. As these opposites relate to and influence each other, they move into a new and—hopefully—better future. Values like evil, discord, and disfiguring are negative only in themselves—that is, when they are abstracted from their oppositional relationality. When paired with their ideal opposites, the “negative” actually has a positive influence on progress and the increase of value and feeling:

Progress is founded upon the experience of discordant feelings. . . . [T]he contribution to Beauty which can be supplied by Discord—in itself destructive and evil—is the positive feeling of a quick shift of aim from the tameness of outworn perfection to some other ideal with its freshness still upon it. Thus the value of Discord is a tribute to the merits of imperfection.<sup>2</sup>

Discord is present in each moment, providing the negative stimulus that spurs life on toward new and greater harmonies. Similarly, tragic disfiguring is always present in the midst of reconciliation.

Whitehead recognizes that it *is* possible to achieve a type of unity without difference. But such undifferentiated unity—homogeneity—is so lacking in “massiveness” and “intensity” (i.e., diversity and vitality) that it merits the term “anesthesia.” We could compare this homogeneous unity to London cuisine. If, as in the past, all the restaurants in this great city served traditional British food and some select Scottish and Welsh dishes, the results would be unified but dull—and quite possibly indigestible! Thankfully, however, since London has become an international mecca, its streets and alleys abound with culinary diversity. Vietnamese, Cantonese,

---

<sup>2</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press/Macmillan, 1933), 257.



Indian, Pakistani, Moroccan, French, Italian, and even American food can now be found as easily as traditional fare. Food *could* be eaten in both Londons; a form of culinary harmony would also exist in each city. Most people would prefer to eat in the international London, however, since there would be a greater variety of tastes, new dishes, special menus, and lower prices due to increased competition.

Another form of reconciliation overcomes difference through force and power rather than the lack thereof. Picture a group of insurgents that is forced to relinquish its radical ideas and unite with the political *status quo*. The errant rebels are thus reconciled with their former adversaries, but only through coercion. Clearly this is an act of totalitarianism, an aberrant and homogeneous reconciliation that must be rejected together with anesthesia. True harmony cannot be confused with either variety of homogeneity—that is, the insipid form that slowly oozes out of a lack of opposition, or the violent form that is established through coercive, purgative force. Homogeneity is no substitute for harmony. In a symphony, a single note played by a clarinet does not become harmonious by asking the musician to increase her volume or by having other instruments play the same “B flat.” The music does not become more harmonious in such a case—it just becomes louder! Real harmony requires the presence of difference: major and minor thirds, diminished sevenths, and suspended ninths. Harmony, like reconciliation, requires creativity. The power of reconciliation must be more creative and active when difference and disfiguring are prominently present.

As harmony and reconciliation move from the past and present toward a future, the disfiguring still remains. Relational thinking recognizes that all aims, designs, and hopes for the future are—or will be—qualified both by the effects of past and present disfiguring, and by novel and yet uncreated forms of discord. In process metaphysics, for example, possibility is pure only in God. Similarly, in our world the future is metaphysically tempered, shaped by the actual mental and physical limits of each individual moment. Thus, as a creative event in the present, any act of reconciling will include elements of ugliness together with visions of beauty, growth pains with maturity, and anxiety with pleasure. This will also be the case in the future: the tragic structure of reality cannot be avoided regardless of one’s hopes to the contrary. Indeed, the hope that healed relationships and situations will be actively preserved in coming days and ultimately depends upon response-ability (i.e., the capacity to respond to

potential dangers and to continually strive for unity). Again, reconciliation requires the use of creative powers that work with, around, and through difference.

As I consider disfiguring and harmony as dual aspects of reconciliation, a dynamic understanding of harmony is always assumed. Reconciliation is the continual creation of new harmonies, an unending process of finding balance in a world of disequilibrium. Reconciliation is not a universal and never-changing state: even when it blossoms and flourishes, it must be as carefully nourished and tended as a prize-winning garden. Nor is reconciliation pie-in-the-sky peace, beauty and love. Yet it has the appearance of easiness—that it is just waiting to be established. The word “reconciliation” trumpets across the airwaves, advertises itself on printed pages, and flows like honey from a preacher’s tongue. Such easy definitions are truly too “easy”: this reconciliation would marry its own cousin, cheap grace. No, authentic reconciliation requires hard work and elastic tolerance, can take radical forms, and is always threatened by past prejudices and the present *status quo*. We must point out, once again, that reconciliation is a creative act, and such acts can frequently be spontaneous, painful, and messy.

Reconciliation is, of course, an important concept in Christian theology. Its two primary meanings are: (1) the restorative manners in which God relates to humans spiritually, and (2) the transformative manners in which humans relate to each other ethically. In the Wesleyan theological idiom, reconciliation is holiness in action as mutualistic love: God loving others, humans loving God, and humans loving each other and their world. This paper highlights interhuman activity instead of pointing to divine agency, although this understanding of reconciliation is somewhat alien to the evangelistic language of Wesleyanism. Indeed, when John Wesley speaks strictly (i.e., scripturally) of reconciliation, it is in an overwhelmingly spiritual sense. To Wesley, reconciliation is how God acts through Jesus Christ to bring about justification, cleansing from carnality, pardon, atonement, adoption, and acceptance for all humanity.<sup>3</sup> Although it is clear

---

<sup>3</sup>See, especially, the “Index of Scriptural References” for Wesley’s homiletic use of Romans 5:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, and Colossians 1:20, the most significant New Testament occurrences of “reconciliation” (*Works*, 4:672-80). I characterize Wesley’s understanding of reconciliation according to his use of these verses.

that Wesley does develop a social ethics,<sup>4</sup> he specifically correlates reconciliation with both the loving of God and of humankind in only two of his sermons.<sup>5</sup> Even so, history repeatedly points out how Wesley's spiritual offspring have fully embraced both sides of reconciliation.

At this point I must disclose an important personal assumption about reconciliation, an eschatological pessimism—perhaps “postmodern realism” is a better term—about whether reconciliation can be fully or finally achieved in our world. Given the Wesleyan predisposition toward an optimism of grace, this position may indeed be troubling. Nevertheless, this understanding of reconciliation is a given in our postmodern world, a world stripped of universals and dominated by naturalism and relativism. Is the Wesleyan view of (prevenient) grace compatible with such realism?

---

<sup>4</sup>Two notable studies are Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), and Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

<sup>5</sup>Granted, the loving of God and others is Wesley's primary definition of holiness, and holiness certainly does include reconciliation when it is defined broadly. Here, however, I must adhere to a narrow (i.e., literal) definition of reconciliation. The important point to be made is that Wesley does not *explicitly* develop a connection between the term “reconciliation” and his social ethics. For example, in “Sermon on the Mount, VIII” (1736), he writes, “It is by faith that the eye of the mind is opened to see the light of the glorious love of God. And as long as it is steadily fixed thereon, on God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, we are more and more filled with the love of God and man, with meekness, gentleness, long-suffering; with all the fruits of holiness, which are, through Christ Jesus, to the glory of God the Father” (*Works*, 1:614). The relationship is more clearly seen in the later work, “On Charity” (1784), an investigation of Paul's “love” of 1 Corinthians 13: “I am thoroughly persuaded that what St. Paul is here directly speaking of is the love of our neighbour. I believe whoever carefully weighs the whole tenor of his discourse will be fully convinced of this. But it must be allowed to be such a love of our neighbour as can only spring from the love of God. And whence does this love flow? Only from that faith which is of the operation of God; which whoever has, has a direct evidence that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.’ When this is particularly applied to his heart, so that he can say with humble boldness, ‘The life which I now live, I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me;’ then, and not till then, ‘the love of God is shed abroad in his heart’” (*Works*, 3:295). It seems likely that Wesley would have included (modern) examples of social/ethical reconciliation within the category of “works of love.” A final word should be offered concerning a third form of reconciliation—the ecological—that is implicit in Wesley's theology but can also be considered a component within a wider social ethics. Notable resources for such an ethic include the sermons “God's Approbation of His Works” (Sermon 56), “God's Love to Fallen Man” (Sermon 59), and “The General Deliverance” (Sermon 60), all written and published between January and September of 1782.

I believe that it is. Even given grace's power to lead, open, and transform, what we know of the enmity, estrangement, or sin—describe it as you will—sickening the human condition tempers our expectations for reconciliation. Indeed, the experience of real-world reconciliation is rarely one of radical and immediate change, except perhaps in principle.

How does one tell those who are oppressed that their lives are better “in principle” from an objective or heavenly perspective? This is no great consolation in today's world! To suggest that ultimate reconciliation is guaranteed objectively by a past event and future hope (i.e., Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of the dead at the world's end) does little to change the subjective realities of pain, suffering, poverty, and discrimination. Traditional Christian eschatology maintains that God's reign is both already and not yet. If this is indeed true, then perhaps postmodern realism and Wesleyan optimism approach the same reality from different perspectives: one positive and the other negative. A coin held up to the light, for example, has both a light and a dark side. Individuals may view both sides sequentially, but two parties must be present for them to be seen simultaneously. In either case, it is still the same coin.

### ***Fingering Disfiguring***

We now consider Mark C. Taylor and his postmodern aesthetics, *Disfiguring*. It is impractical to fully consider here Taylor's deconstruction of Western “ontotheological” language and the controversy instigated by the publication of *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* in 1984.<sup>6</sup> Even so, a brief discussion of this earlier work's thesis is necessary since *Disfiguring* is a continuation of the intellectual program initiated by *Erring*. Given my intent to apply Taylor's understanding of disfiguring to reconciliation/harmony, however, I must point out a significant inherent problem

---

<sup>6</sup>On the *Erring* controversy, see *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54:3 (1986). Noteworthy criticisms of Taylor include works by David Ray Griffin, “Postmodern Theology and A/theology: A Response to Mark C. Taylor,” in Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 29-61; Peter Hodgson, “Review of *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*,” *Religious Studies Review* 12:3-4:256-61; Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Wesley A. Kort, *Bound to Differ: The Dynamics of Theological Discourses* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); and Susan E. Wennemeyr, “Dancing in the Dark: Deconstructive A/theology Leaps with Faith,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66:3 (Fall, 1998): 571-87.

with this application. Taylor rejects, among other things, the notion of the whole. There is no greater meaning other than play itself. There is no sum/unity/One that may be drawn from the parts/fragments/Many. Because the idea of harmony, even a radically dynamic harmony, represents one such whole, reconciliation could thus be seen as an invalid idea and course of action to Taylor. If, however, his notion of disfiguring is only generally accepted as that which provides the basic inspiration and four-part structure for this treatment of harmony, as opposed to its content and method in the strictest sense, then this inconsistency can hopefully be escaped.

The ontotheological language of Western theology must, in Taylor's eyes, be torn apart. Using Derrida's method of deconstruction in particular, and drawing further inspiration from the criticisms of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Taylor attacks the notions of God, self, history, and book (i.e., Scripture) in the first half of *Erring*. After his deconstruction is (in)complete, Taylor then reconstructs human thought with postmodern images that differ from their dogmatic counterparts but essentially correspond to the underlying needs and issues that they address. The specifics of this erratic process emerge through a close reading of the text; here we may only highlight his thesis that a playful embrace of *différance* must replace dyadic thought. His criticism of ontotheology is sharp:

The Western theological tradition, in all its evident diversity, rests upon a polar or, more precisely, dyadic foundation. Though consistently monotheistic, Christian theology is repeatedly inscribed in binary terms. The history of religious thought in the West can be read as a pendular movement between seemingly exclusive and evident opposites.<sup>7</sup>

A long roster of dyads follows in *Erring*. Although Taylor does not include the terms reconcile, harmony, or disfigure on his list, he does include pairs which are similar and relevant to this discussion, including "Order-Chaos," "Affirmation-Negation," "Clarity-Confusion," and "Good-Evil." All of these dyads support an understanding of reconciliation as differentiated unity—something that Taylor obviously wishes to avoid. He then continues his criticism:

---

<sup>7</sup>Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8.

Like its intellectual twin, philosophy, theology does not regard these opposites as equivalent. It refuses to allow the possibility that oppositional terms can coexist peacefully. Invariably one term is privileged through the divestment of its relative. The resultant economy of privilege sustains an asymmetrical hierarchy in which one member governs or rules the other throughout the theological, logical, axiological political domains.<sup>8</sup>

Here we draw closer to how Taylor's thought, and how the notion of disfiguring, in particular, applies to a discussion of the ethical dimensions of reconciliation. Taylor sees Western thought as an oppressive and self-justifying system that aids and abets those who subdue the masses. Susan E. Wennemyr highlights this ethical undercurrent in Taylor's work:

Taylor sets out to account for the fact that human social behavior includes the constant establishment of hierarchies. Indeed, while he refuses the label "ethicist," his seemingly arcane concerns ultimately constitute an appeal that people be treated with dignity. The question that torments Taylor is the one he voices in *Altarity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]: "Are others who are different to be converted, integrated, dominated, excluded, or repressed?" (xxi). It is to protect the disenfranchised other that Taylor identifies the vast array of conceptual dualisms that permeate western thought. By re-tracing the conceptual crime behind social relations of domination, Taylor hopes to expose a scandalous system, nipping domination in its . . . bud.<sup>9</sup>

The place of ethics in his thought, unlike his writing style, is not errant or abstract. Like Kierkegaard, a thinker who profoundly influences his work, Taylor views the ethical as a bridge between the aesthetic and the spiritual.<sup>10</sup> While these three interrelated components are primary subjects in the books *Disfiguring, Tears* (1990), and *About Religion* (1999), they are also discussed frequently in other post-*Erring* writings.

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Wennemyr, 573.

<sup>10</sup>Taylor, in fact, states that this is one his primary intentions in *Disfiguring*: "It would not be inaccurate to understand this venture as an effort to rethink the interrelation of Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence" (*Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 6). Henceforth all references from this primary work will be listed in parenthetical notation in the body of the text.

In *Disfiguring* Taylor offers an a/theological reading of religious influences in and upon modern and postmodern aesthetics. His goal is to “refigure the sacred” for the contemporary (i.e., postmodern) reader.<sup>11</sup> Although God, in the postmodern West, is “dead,” ultimately there is still something of value to be gained from engaging in quasi-religious thought. Actually, Taylor identifies *two* valuable tasks that a/theologians perform: (1) re-reading theological traditions to discover what has been left unsaid, and (2) reconstructing both the said and unsaid in a manner appropriate to the postmodern present.<sup>12</sup> These are the primary tasks of *Disfiguring*:

The larger purpose of this book is constructive or, perhaps more accurately, reconstructive. Though theological reflection

<sup>11</sup>By “a/theology” Taylor means doing quasi-religious thinking by means of tracing traditional Western theological categories within the post-Nietzschean “death-of-God” context. Absolutely essential to understanding Taylor’s program is his starting point: the presupposition “that the God of the Jewish and Christian traditions is ‘dead’—not only meaningless to us but altogether absent as transcendent, omnipotent, or omniscient creator” (Wennemeyer, 576). This is a presupposition in the strictest sense, for Taylor’s works do not contain lengthy discussions of God’s ontological status, et cetera. Rather, he begins his work at God’s end—period. The question he pursues, then, is the value of value or the meaning of meaning in the absence of ultimate Value/Meaning (i.e., God). To define a/theology according to the logic established in *Erring*, one can say that while containing Christian and atheistic elements, a/theology is neither one nor the other. It is neither religious nor unreligious. Rather, it is an *irreligious* humanism that “plays around” in the space between theism and atheism, asking similar questions but demanding alternate answers. A quotation from *Erring* perhaps illustrates the a/theological program better than further explanation or definitions: “The erring a/theologian is driven to consider and reconsider errant notions: transgression, subversion, mastery, utility, consumption, domination, narcissism, nihilism, possession, uncanniness, repetition, tropes, writing, dissemination, dispossession, expropriation, impropriety, anonymity, spending, sacrifice, death, desire, delight, wandering, aberrance, carnival, comedy, superficiality, carnality, duplicity, shiftiness, undecidability, and spinning. In view of these preoccupations, it should be clear that erring thought is neither *properly* theological nor nontheological, theistic nor atheistic, religious nor secular, believing nor nonbelieving” (*Erring*, 12). Kierkegaard’s influence is evident even here in this roster of a/theological “notions,” for the list contains words relevant to all three disciplines (i.e., aesthetics, ethics, and religion).

<sup>12</sup>Taylor offers a more simplified definition of a/theology in *About Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): “There are two interrelated aspects of the a/theological enterprise, which roughly correspond to the distinction between historical and constructive theology. The first task of the a/theologian is to reread the theological tradition against the grain in an effort to discern the unsaid in the midst of the said. This is the deconstructive moment of a/theology. Second, it is necessary to move beyond deconstruction *sensu strictissimo* to reconfigure theological notions in an a/theological register” (40).

in our century has tended to dismiss the visual arts, nineteenth-century theologians, philosophers, and artists insisted upon the inseparability of art and religion. I am convinced that certain developments in contemporary art and architecture provide untapped resources for religious reflection. The result of a reconsideration of the interplay between religion and art is not a return to conclusions reached during the last century. To the contrary, a thoughtful exploration of some of the most provocative art of our time opens an alternative space for the a/theological imagination (5).

Having stated the intent of this art of historical interpretation, Taylor then defines and explores the three “alternate strategies” of disfiguring (i.e., the aesthetic, moral, and religious) that he feels twentieth-century art and architecture reveal.

The first type of disfiguring appears in modernist aesthetics and is marked by figural abstraction. Through the removal of human forms and their replacement with increasingly abstract shapes (e.g., geometric, linear, and polymorphic) and symbols, the modernist aesthetic seeks to achieve “pure” form and spiritual meaning. Taylor sees the reduction of figure/likeness to pure form, exemplified by the Cubist, Abstract, Futurist, Suprematist, De Stijl, Bauhaus, Color Field, and Minimalist movements, as the negation of the symbolic or presentational function of the aesthetic. When the aesthetic is *pure* form, it becomes (i.e., replaces) the signified itself:

Modern art and architecture dis-figure by removing figure from the work of art. Abstract or nonobjective art and formalist architecture seek both to uncover the transcendental signified by erasing signifiers and to discover pure form by eliminating all ornamentation. Though not always explicitly religious, the theoesthetic enterprise is undeniably motivated by spiritual impulses. The goal of modernist aesthetic education is reconciliation with the “reality” that underlies appearances (189).

The works of Dada, certain Surrealists, various postmodern “neo-” architectures (e.g., neo-Gothic, neo-Cubist, neo-Neoclassical, the neo-organism of Michael Graves), and especially Pop Art usher in the second variety of disfiguring. Technically speaking, Pop marks the end of the modernist aesthetic, but Taylor carefully demonstrates how modernism continues to (neg-



atively) influence subsequent postmodern art and architecture by providing the ideas and styles against which postmodernism develops its aesthetic agenda. Such forms of postmodern art and architecture are thus derivative. In examples of “‘modernist’ postmodernism,” as Taylor terms this movement, the figure returns to disfigure the purist “ascetic aesthetic” when the visual arts are marked by marred and misshapen figures, or when architecture is inhabited by the implied presence of past populations (e.g., Greeks, Romans, and medieval Europeans). Taylor suggests that this second style of disfiguring is an intentional “unthinking” that unfortunately fails to accomplish that which it set out to do. The third and final form of disfiguring emerges in postmodern art and architecture proper, and is that which (dis)appears in the space between the two preceding forms of disfiguring:

[S]ome of the most creative contemporary painters and architects are seeking a third way that falls *between* abstraction and figuration. In this interstitial site, figure is neither erased nor absolutized but is used with and against itself to figure that which eludes figuring. Torn figures mark the trace of something else, something other that *almost* emerges in the cracks of faulty images. This other neither is nor is not—it is neither being nor nonbeing, fullness nor void, immanent nor transcendent (9).

The truly postmodern aesthetic is one that negates human figures and aesthetic ideas and presuppositions (i.e., both physical and mental figuring) in such a manner that the resulting empty space is *not* null and void. Taylor emphasizes that this form of disfiguring is un-negation—that is, it positively presents nothingness and void as *something*.

The special relevance of *Disfiguring’s* thesis for this discussion of ethics and reconciliation may now be pointed out. Through his deconstructive method, Taylor attempts to overcome the oppressive aesthetic and intellectual hierarchies (i.e., modernist aesthetics and Christian theology) that have come to be regarded as the norm in “traditional” Western thought. The problem, of course, is that the normative continually asserts itself through its own power to secure its place as tradition itself. The intellectual *status quo* must therefore be subverted:

[T]he modern will *always* be present. Despite its complexity, the presence of modernism can be understood as, among other things, the conviction that presence is realizable in the present. Such belief necessarily tends toward the repressive, for it

attempts to remove, erase, or wipe away everything that disrupts the utopian dream of presence. If the twentieth century teaches us anything, it is that our dreams often become nightmares and that utopia can turn into hell. It is an old, perhaps ancient tale: the repressed does not go away but always returns. The question that pursues us and that calls for pursuit is whether this eternal return opens the space-time of a post-modernism that repeatedly subverts the modernism we can never completely escape (12).

Taylor is not overtly concerned with Christian religion in *Disfiguring*, having moved his a/theological program to the margins of book that is primarily a work of interpretive art criticism/history, but his a/theological criticisms are still fundamental to the work. Although Taylor paints “modernism” in the foreground of his negative portrait of twentieth-century art and architecture, Christian thought is clearly the landscape in which the image appears.

### **Excusing (The Mess)**

The most common definition of “disfiguring” refers to a marring or deformity that is perceived visually. To disfigure is to destroy beauty, to spoil form, or to create ugliness. A second and equally important meaning—namely, disfiguring as removal of the figural—begins to emerge as Taylor conducts an extensive etymology of “disfigure”:

On the most obvious level, *to disfigure* means “to mar the figure or appearance of, destroy the beauty of, to deform or deface.” In less common usages, *to disfigure* also means “to disguise” or “to carve.” By extension, *disfigurement* designates a defacement, deformity, blemish, or flaw. Additional dimensions of *disfigure* appear when the word is broken into its constituent parts. The prefix *dis-* denotes “negation, lack, invalidation, or deprivation.” Among the many meanings of *figure*, which is both a noun and a verb, the most relevant for my purposes include “form, shape; an embodied (human) form; a person considered with regard to visible form or appearance; the image, likeness, or representation of something material or immaterial; an arrangement of lines or other markings forming an ornamental device; one of the devices combined into a decorative pattern; to form, shape; to trace, mark; to be an image, symbol, or type; to adorn or mark with figures; to embellish or

ornament with a design or pattern.” When taken together, the two parts of *disfigure* suggest the negation or deprivation of form, image, likeness, or representation; the removal of symbol, ornament, design, or pattern (6).

Taylor’s second definition of disfiguring has great significance given the dominance of modernist and abstractionist aesthetics in the first half of twentieth-century art and architecture. Disfiguring as *anti-figural* aesthetic slowly but deliberately leads not only to the removal of human figures, but also to the negation of the very figures (i.e., symbols and geometric forms) that replace them. This new purism is the heart and soul of the abstractionist/modernist perspective. What is so unique is its subversive orientation: the beautiful and figural are now perceived negatively as disturbing and distorting presence. The appearance of disfiguring form, whether as superficial naturalism, the “pretty,” human shapes, or symbols, thus affronts purist sensibilities and incites some to demand the removal of the offending forms. These two forms of disfiguring—that is, disfiguring as the perception of scarring presence and as the removal of figure or symbol—are therefore thoroughly interdependent. According to the modernist/abstractionist perspective, to disfigure is the figural excusing of the mess.

Our conception of reconciliation as disfiguring harmony operates in the same manner. Any sensitive theological assessment of human social conditions must recognize the thoroughly distorted and scarred face of interpersonal, inter-institutional, and international relations. In Christian theology these insights are uncompromisingly declared in the criticisms (e.g., social, political, economic, and ecclesiastical) advanced by so-called “marginal” theologies—that is, those theological perspectives that are forced to “do theology” of liberation and difference from the margins/sidelines of Christian faith because of the church’s hierarchical, pro-Western, and androcentric power structures. To view the world through the eyes of such marginalized Others is (1) to see the forms of discrimination, injustice, and hatred that scar the world; (2) to identify and name those directly or most responsible for the disfiguring use of power; and (3) to demand the disfiguring (i.e., removal) of the same in the name of justice, equality, and reconciliation.

If harmony is to play as reconciliation between diverse individuals and people groups, the playing field must be cleared and made as level as possible. This process of clearing the mess will certainly be continual since

human beings and institutions, by their very natures, tend to use and abuse power as they imagine and pattern reality according to their own tastes, needs, and biases. Reconciliation requires that guilty parties must harmonize with the ideal, instead. The oppressors should now follow the lead of the (O)thers by acknowledging the mess they have created and by excusing themselves from positions of domination. For the powerful, reconciliation begins with quitting.

### **Including (The Miss)**

Taylor identifies two distinct but related meanings in his lengthy definition of “disfigure.” As was noted above, both forms—figural removal and figural defacement—are primarily perceived visually. With a clever twist of the imagination, however, Taylor pushes the limits of his definition even further and into the mental landscape by suggesting that disfiguring is not only the seeing of a mess and its subsequent absence, but also a thinking that is *miss*:

But *figure* also means “to calculate; to take into consideration; to solve, decipher, or comprehend”—as when I figure something out. Accordingly, *disfigure* suggests the negation of calculation, deprivation of solution, and lack of decipherment or comprehension—as when I fail to figure something out (6).

As Taylor considers various forms of post-modernist art and architecture, his judgment upon the overwhelming majority of aesthetic creations is that their artists somehow misapprehend the postmodern. Although the works appear to provide new and radical solutions to the aesthetic, moral, and religious problems posed by human existence in the latter half of the twentieth century, the fact is that they actually miss their marks. Taylor suggests that the figural (i.e., re-figuring) response to abstraction is, again, derivative—an answer entirely dependent upon a prior question. As a prefigured movement, then, the designation “‘modern’ postmodernism” is appropriate.

Contemporary theologies of reconciliation run the same risk of *miss* as that found in (re)figural postmodern art and architecture. Even given the critical insights and conscience extended to Christian thought by marginal/Other theologies, who is to say that the “new and improved” generation of reconciliation will not flounder in the same manner as its predecessors? Try as we might, the process of fixing the mess often results in yet another mess—if not a *worse* one. The pathetic poet of Hebrew Scripture could easily be speaking of the endlessly messy to-and-fros of reconciliation:

. . . a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build up,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
. . . a time to embrace and a time to distance, . . .  
a time to tear and a time to mend, . . .  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace [Ecclesiastes 3:2-8].

Reconciliation grows out of such alternating rhythms of life, playing within its errant movements. Pleasure and pain, constructive and deconstructive, positive and negative—all contribute to reconciliatory progress.

As disfiguring, then, reconciliation lies somewhere *between*: in the betwixt of antipathy and love, of discord and harmony, of problem and solution. Again, real reconciliation is not a picture-perfect, pie-in-the-sky ideal devoid of messiness. Rather, it is a mess that, stubbornly, is also *miss*. If the Christian understanding of reconciliation can go beyond Taylor's aesthetic definition of disfiguring, however, it must dwell on and in the miss rather than to simply move on to the next stage. By this I mean to suggest that in order for Christian reconciliation to be effective, it must accept the inevitability of *miss*: that is to say, it must recognize that reconciliation, even when most harmonious, will nevertheless remain biased, prone to error, limited by the past, having insufficient imagination, acting in self-interest and for self promotion, currying for favor, etc. This inevitability must stand as a warning rather than an excuse, however. It cannot be used to justify missed opportunities for reconciliation. In fact, the point that must be made here is that reconciliation is to be embraced despite the new mess of miss. "Getting it right" first requires commitment to others and to the mess itself, and then perseverance while muddling in the middle.

The key to both *Disfiguring's* interpretation of modernist-postmodern refiguration and the miss-ing ministry of reconciliation is *presence*. Although Taylor ultimately rejects the modernist/Christian metaphysics of presence, his discussion of the spirituality of presence in architecture has significance for aesthetic and ethical reconciliation. He states,

Rather than realizing a utopia in which human being can reach fulfillment, the inhumanity of modern architecture both reflects and creates a sense of alienation. . . . In this simplistic calculus, abstract = alienated, and figural = reconciled. The purpose of

[modernist] postmodern architecture is to overcome alienation by making people feel at home in the world (210-11).

Being-as-presence is not enough, however. To be human is to do more than simply exist within space(s). A theological aesthetic, for example, may maintain that humans are truly present in their world only when they play aesthetically within it, creating narratives and enacting symbolic dramas.<sup>13</sup> Taylor does, in fact, identify myth and ritual as common threads that tie humans to their domestic environments, binding them together in an organic human-structural whole:

The basic aspiration expressed in myth and ritual is the longing for wholeness and reconciliation in which every trace of personal and social fragmentation is overcome. Myth and ritual are mnemonic strategies through which individuals attempt to return to the eternal origin of their being for renewal and regeneration. Re-membering is supposed to overcome the dis-memberment inevitably suffered in the course of time. Within the world of myth and ritual, to arrive at the origin is to return to the sheltering home that we have never really left (211).

In the process of ethical reconciliation, humans are thrown into a new “leveled” environment devoid of the familiar. If they accept the new challenge of composing harmonies, they first commit to presence before moving on to finding new melodic threads—myth and ritual—from which they weave and reweave a new composition. Although Taylor does not specifically address *Christian* myth and ritual at this point, it is obvious that retaining these is absolutely necessary for working toward reconciliation from within a Christian context—even given the pluralism dominating the larger postmodern social environment. The connections and strength provided by these two threads help us pull through the miss-ings. Miss and myth, presence and practice—these are required elements for Christians wishing to refigure the disfigured through reconciliation.

### **Disfiguring The Sacred**

In *Disfiguring's* third and final movement, Taylor finally completes his a/theological project of (de)construction. The notion of *presence* figures highly in the discussion, but now stands for that which is subverted rather

---

<sup>13</sup>On the significance of aesthetic play, see, for example, Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793-95), and Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1997), 101-134.

than upheld. Again, one of the ontotheological problems that a/theology deconstructs is the notion of Being as presence. Taylor maintains that following the death of God, Being and presence cannot be equated since their divine Guarantor is lost/absent. Taylor does not wish to be a nihilist, however. Although he concludes that “God die[d] and is reborn as a sign that points to *nothing* beyond itself,”<sup>14</sup> he still finds traces of the sacred in the world—hence the a/theological project. Amidst the absence of (God’s) presence, a void remains that is not nothingness. Rather, it is something—something *other*. The center of the void is not divine Other, of course, for it cannot be God. In the midst of this mystifying, maddening riddle is Taylor’s logic of un-negation that is *not* the same as double negative:

[T]here is a third reading of “disfiguring” that points to a different version of postmodernism. In its third guise, disfiguring neither erases nor absolutizes figure but enacts what Freud describes as the process of “denegation,” through which the repressed or refused returns. Neither simply an affirmation nor a negation, de-negation is an un-negation that affirms rather than negates negation. The affirmation of negation by way of un-negation subverts every effort to negate negation. When interpreted in terms of denegation, disfiguring figures the impossibility of figuring in such a way that the unfigurable “appears” as a disappearing in and through the faults, fissures, cracks, and tears of figures (230).<sup>15</sup>

The question that one naturally asks at this point, then, is what *is* the unfigurable if not Being, God, or the Real? In a word, it is the *sacred*—but a sacred that lies beyond limited and common thinking of deity, of life and death, and of time and space.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Taylor, *About Religion*, 26.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>16</sup>Taylor offers the following clarification of denegation and the difference between God and the sacred: “When denegation involves God and the sacred, the intricate operation of negation without negation becomes even more complex. God and the sacred are not merely opposites, or are they exactly the same. Though different, their difference is of a different order than the difference that is the opposite of identity. Eluding every oppositional structure, *the sacred is the condition of the possibility of opposition as such*. Thus, the sacred is that which allows God to be God by enabling God to be other than everything that is not God. God, in other words, is an after-effect of symptom of the sacred. In this way, the denegation of the sacred is not simply negation but is the un-negation without which God cannot exist. While negation with negation is undeniably negative, it is, more importantly, at the same time radically affirmative” (*Ibid.*, 32; emphases added).

Time and space are essential to the task of understanding Taylor's a/theological definition of the sacred. Through the rifts/fissures/tears that appear in space-time, the sacred appears. The holy *is* (w)hole. The sacred, we have seen above, is "the condition of the possibility of opposition as such." It is thus the "field" that plays forth the neither/nor, opening up the real possibility of human erring and exile, wonder and wander. The sacred is thus that which "God" (i.e., God as a philosophical concept and as an object of devotion) hides and obscures.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, "God" is not entirely absent from the sacred, for both *are* and *are* present insofar as they appear in confrontational thinking, crossed purposes, radical relation and relativity, and the play of difference. In fact, it is *différance* itself that is the sacred, for *différance* is that which not only precedes all individual existence (i.e., being "apart" or "out of" that which is other), but also spatio-temporally defers all existents through spacing and temporizing. The problem is that the sacred, like "God" and God, is self-disfiguring: "Inasmuch as difference itself is never present, it cannot be re-presented."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps a better question to ask of Taylor is what *opens* the sacred. Although he rejects the modernist notion that the aesthetic—as opposed to the religious—possesses the greatest power to express the sacred for contemporary culture, Taylor does believe that postmodern art and architecture *can* figure the unfigurable in space-time through the "notions of discontinuity, distortion, fragmentation, repetition, transference, rupture, interruption, and dislocation" (242).<sup>19</sup> Again, the sacred cannot be fig-

<sup>17</sup>Taylor never provides a simple definition of "sacred." The sacred is not opposite of "God," for his logic does not permit this. The sacred is thus the denegation of God, a functional opposite which nevertheless assumes the role of "God" in our secular world. Taylor states, "*While I no longer believe in God, I can no longer avoid believing in the sacred. . . . The sacred 'is' the denegation of 'God,' and God is the denegation of the sacred. . . . While the old is never adequate to the new, the 'sacred' deepens the incommensurability between the said and the unsaid by grafting the unnamable onto a nonconcept. The sacred, which, as we shall see, does not exist and yet is not nothing, is what the concept of God is (unknowingly) constructed not to think*" (Ibid., 31).

<sup>18</sup>Mark C. Taylor, *Tears* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), 111.

<sup>19</sup>In a discussion of Heidegger and the obscurity and repression of Being and difference, Taylor seems to imply that art is the best starting point for recognizing or comprehending "the mystery of the Holy" as difference: "The possibility of this experience opens with *the origin of the work of art* (Ibid., 112; emphases added). The highlighted phrase is the title of the seminal aesthetic work of Martin Heidegger, whose philosophical ideas greatly influence Taylor, both directly and through Derrida's writings.



ured/represented, but its (un)presence can be traced analogously through aesthetic disjunction. Works of art in which the sacred *différance* leaves traces *as* difference include the paintings of Anselm Kieffer and Edvard Munch, the sculptures of Richard Serra, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Fred Sandbeck, the architecture of Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman, and the landscape architecture and sculptures of Michael Heizer. Perhaps more important to Taylor, however, are writing and poetry, which he terms *scripture*.<sup>20</sup> In the post-death-of-God world, scripture fills the “divine milieu”, the middle space that God formerly occupied; as the medium of radical relation and relativity, scripture is the “eternally recurring” play of differences, the “ceaseless oscillation” of (re)writing and (re)interpreting.<sup>21</sup> The sacred is the poetry of difference.

The question “So what?” could easily be asked at this point. The preceding discussion of Taylor’s understanding of proper postmodern disfig-

<sup>20</sup>Two of the principal ideas that Heidegger develops in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” which come to Taylor both through his readings of Heidegger and Derrida, provide the foundations of his a/theological aesthetics. The first of these is the notion of the *Riss* (“rift” or “tear”) that opens the opening in which art plays forth Being. The art-opening is simultaneously a rending and a re-binding, a “setting up of a world” of existential Truth and a “setting forth of earth” through the art’s physical qualities. The two, while torn, are nevertheless unified even as they strive against each other; world and earth belong together in “the unity of work-being.” Through art, the Being veiled by common being(s) is, in Heidegger’s words, “unveiled,” “unconcealed,” “cleared,” “opened,” and “lighted.” The unconcealing of Truth occurs not through common objects—*techné*—and making, but through the imaginative act of aesthetic creation, proper (i.e., *poesis*). This understanding of art-ing as *poesis* (e.g., scripting poetry and writing) is the second idea that Taylor employs. Heidegger writes, “Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent in thrownness. Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*. The nature of art, on which both the art works and the artist depends, is the setting-itself-into-work of truth. It is due to art’s poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual” (“The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper & Row, 1975], 71-72).

<sup>21</sup>In the important chapter “Writing of God” in *Erring*, Taylor states: “In scripture, all ‘things’ are thoroughly interrelated. The specificity of any particularity is a function of its difference from otherness. Though usually overlooked (or repressed) by common sense, *difference from* other is at the same time *relation to* other. Since all things are *radically* related, everything is thoroughly relative” (108).

uring has, admittedly, been disproportionately long and complex in relation to the other two definitions (i.e., the modernist and ‘modernist’-post-modern) considered here. Nevertheless, I feel that this portion of Taylor’s work not only places important limits on how reconciliation may be defined, but also offers valuable resources to theological aesthetics. First, acts of reconciliation must be viewed as momentary events, fragmentary pieces that lead to the solving and (re)solving of an ever-larger and -jumbled puzzle. Reconciliation is not a long and seamless procession of peace; rather, it breaks forth suddenly in and as openings through the *status quo*, erring to and fro between harmonious moments. This leads to our second point, namely, that reconciliation is concrete rather than abstract. Reconciliation *is* only when it *occurs*. It is not a theoretical ideal to be discussed by a round-table *concilium*, but only *ex-ists*—that is, it literally *is* by outing itself—as act(ing) and event(ing).

Third, we learn through Taylor that the act of reconciliation emerges from active opposition, not isolation. The individual who simply reads and internalizes Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* or King’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* does not truly act. Engagement is requisite. One must come face to face with self and Other in the playing field of reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> Again, oppositional conflict can have *positive* constructive value—a value that is recognized by process thought as well as Taylor’s a/theology. Fourth, one discovers that reconciliation is an aesthetic creation. It does not simply happen; rather, its genesis requires imagination, effort, and the creative use of power. As there is an art of politics, so there is an art of reconciliation. To live harmoniously is to live poetically, to act beautifully in the world, both

---

<sup>22</sup>Hans Georg Gadamer’s understanding of aesthetic play is extremely helpful at this point. Here the “Other” must be read as the work of art that itself becomes a subject and “plays” upon the individual as much as the individual projects self upon the Other/subject. Gadamer states, “[T]he work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The ‘subject’ of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. . . . The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players” (*Truth and Method*, 102-103). In reconciliation, however, play is comprised by individuals who are both “subject” and “Other,” simultaneously affecting the Other, being affected by the Other, and being affected by the self.

incarnating and imbuing it with a certain holiness or, following Taylor, a sacredness.<sup>23</sup>

The inherent goodness and beauty of reconciliation leads to a fifth limit: the (implied) absence of God. Ethical reconciliation, strictly speaking, is human acts done on human terms for their human(e) value. There is an obvious air of humanism about this, but again we may ask, “So what?” Taylor, the a/theologian, would demand that all the openings of reconciliation require divine disfiguring—that is, that God be left out of the picture. While Christians naturally resist such a notion, would their objections necessitate concluding that each act of reconciliation, when judged by and for itself, must therefore have less value than if such disfiguring did not occur? Whether or not God’s name is invoked, the actions are still ethical and reconciliatory. The problem, then, appears to be the matter of (divine) perspective. Fortunately, the resolution of this problem is not our current task!

### **The Economics of Harmony**

Many of the questions about the value and meaning of life in the post-modern world can be expressed with a single hieroglyph: \$. The dollar sign is a symbol of how people—or at least most financially empowered *Americans*—make personal decisions. What is the bottom line? How much will it take? What is the “cash value” to me? In traditional Christianity, of course, the final formula for judging life’s value and meaning is a matter of *spiritual* economy. In the process of being reconciled to God, the medium of exchange is one’s soul. The question, in Jesus’ words, is this: “What good will it be for me to gain the whole world but lose my soul?” (Matt. 16:26). In the contemporary world, however, the cost of ethical reconciliation is figured with different formulas: those that consider time factors, economic value, effort variables, etc. Harmony does have a cost, but it cannot be figured easily.

---

<sup>23</sup>This idea is wonderfully illustrated in a story told by Norman Pittenger: “Charles Hartshorne once told a couple to whom I introduced him, and who asked him for advice on the education of their three children, that they should seek to enable the children ‘to live beautiful lives.’ If by this he had meant beauty in the superficial sense of ‘the pretty,’ the merely emotional, or the sentimentality which is a cheap substitute for the truly ‘lovely,’ he would have been giving my friends bad advice; but as a matter of fact he was saying something quite different—he was urging something more like ‘the beauty of holiness’ and ‘the holiness of beauty’” (“The Priority of the Aesthetic,” *Faith and Freedom* 40, no. 118 [Spring, 1987]: 24).

The “\$” is a significant barrier standing in the way of reconciliation. The “\$” is a figuring figure requiring disfiguring; it is an evaluating valuation that must be devalued. Again, the question that the “\$” poses for reconciliation is that of cost. What is the price of peace? What is the price of equality? What is the price of remuneration? There is no simple method by which one sets a price on the value of an individual, family, town, or culture destroyed by war, genocide, enslavement, or forced relocation. Nevertheless, there must be an offering if reconciliation is to occur.

In Taylor’s discussion of disfiguring, this meaning—the economic—seems to escape him.<sup>24</sup> “Disfigure,” as we have seen, is a nuanced, multi-valent word. It is ironic yet appropriate that a postmodern theorist like Taylor, one of those who are concerned with temporal value rather than eternal meaning, would overlook the almighty dollar sign. Even so, he implicitly connects disfiguring and cash value with Pop Art in a discussion of “Currency”—a chapter title in *Disfiguring*. In this review of the growing prominence of “\$” throughout the history of “fine” art, the unstated presence of noted art critic Arthur Danto casts a shadow over the conversation. According to Danto, Pop sounds the death knell of the modernist aesthetics.<sup>25</sup> In Pop, both idealism and abstraction complete their respective critical (i.e., self-destructive) courses. In idealism’s demise, capital “A” Art breathes its last as it reduces itself from bold and innovative concepts to the mere shadows of ideas. In Pop, art is *all* idea—but an idea that is presented in the style and content of slick commercial art to such an extent that it becomes (1) purely superficial as total presence or (2) completely vacuous through repetition *ad nauseum*. Abstraction paints itself into a similar corner. Once aesthetic objects and ideas have been exhaustively abstracted into the uniform lines, rectangles, and circles of Color Field painting, there is nothing left to symbolize the aesthetic except *common* (i.e., traditionally non-aesthetic) symbols and objects such as household products, food items, governmental flags and seals, televisions, automobiles, shuttlecocks, and photojournalistic portraits. The Pop paintings and sculptures of Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenberg graphically illustrate the ultimate end(s) of modernist self-criticism (i.e., disfiguring as

---

<sup>24</sup>Taylor does use economics as a means of deconstruction on other occasions, however. See, for example, the essays “Discrediting God” and “Christianity and the Capitalism of Spirit” in *About Religion*.

<sup>25</sup>Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *Journal of Philosophy* (1964): 571-84.

abstraction). The appearance of Pop's commercialism can be seen, in this reading of Taylor and Danto, to mark the end of the oppressive dyadic modernism Taylor fears will always be present. Disfiguring is thus an ethical means by which aesthetic-intellectual freedom may be reached.

In a similar manner, the material barrier must be disfigured if reconciliation is to play harmoniously between individuals and groups separated by money matters. Figuring how to disfigure this figure—" \$"—requires closing the books and canceling debts. The next barrier standing, however, is the process of figuring the appropriate figures. How does the United States, for example, count the cost of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction? Should their compounded effects be figured as one compounds interest? Discussions of reparations for African-Americans, introduced in the 1920s by Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, gained prominence in 1969 as the activist James Forman presented his *Black Manifesto* in churches nationwide. His demand for \$500 million as the fulfillment to the promise of "forty acres and a mule," given by the American government a century earlier, generated much discussion but few lasting results. In the last decade, U. S. Representative John Conyers (D, Michigan) has repeatedly introduced bills requesting a Congressional study of reparations, but to little effect. A chapter in Randall Robinson's provoking book, *The Debt: What America Owes Blacks* (Dutton/Plume, 1999), has recently brought greater public attention to the idea, however. Although the U.S. government does not appear to take these reconciliatory reparations seriously, some progress has been made. The passage of the American Civil Liberties Act of 1988, for example, mandated that reimbursements would be made to over 80,000 Japanese-Americans held in interment camps during World War II. Payments of \$20,000 accompanied formal letters of apology from the government; in ten years a total of more than \$1.65 billion was paid to survivors or their descendants. In Florida, state legislators allocated \$2 million in 1994 for reparations to surviving descendants of the 1923 Rosewood race riot.

The results of international financial and property reparations to Holocaust survivors and their descendants are equally mixed. The "Holocaust Victims Asset Recovery Litigation" suit against Swiss Banking Corporation and Credit Suisse, settled in 1998 for \$1.25 billion, stands to benefit approximately 440,000 individual applicants. In January 2000, a similar case against Bank Austria settled for \$40 million. Of this total, up

to \$30 million is allocated for individuals; all remaining funds are designated for humanitarian projects. Large suits are also pending against German and Dutch financial institutions implicated in the Nazi seizure and transfer of funds. Despite commanding considerable media attention, the return of thousands of art objects stolen by Nazis and processed by collaborating art dealers has proceeded more slowly. There are several notable exceptions, however. In 1996, a thousand *objects d'art* were returned to the Austrian Rothschild family by their government. In September 2000, the city of Leipzig, Germany, restored eighty paintings to the descendants of its civic art collectors, Gustav and Clara Kirstein. France's Drai Commission, established by the government in September 1999, has received over five thousand requests for remuneration; the payment for its few settled cases has averaged nearly \$20,000. On the whole, however, the matter of determining the ownership of art objects with questionable provenance and then providing for their return and/or adequate remuneration has been turned over to government-appointed committees of art experts that can only proceed on a case-by-case basis.<sup>26</sup>

The disfiguring removal of “\$” is no guarantee of future harmony. Again, the work of reconciliation is hard work. When several generations—or generation upon generation—pass between initial acts of animosity and the first overtures of reconciliation, money is a poor excuse for real restitution. The past cannot be radically changed; human lives and all their potential remain eternally lost; feelings of pain and suffering can never be unfelt. Nevertheless, to publicly name past evils, to accept responsibility for past actions, to provide an official apology, and to humbly extend a compensatory offering of peace—these actions remove important barriers created in the past. Again, a space must be cleared for harmony to have a greater chance of coming to expression in the present and future.

### **End Point(s)**

A “proper” conclusion will presumably provide a certain closure through summary and suggestion. Given the understanding of reconciliation developed above, however, here we find only a *different* ending, an uncertain leading toward new end/pointing. One such end point occurs

---

<sup>26</sup>“Status Report, September 2000,” Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Council. Document procured through the Commission’s official Internet site: [www.comartrecovery.org](http://www.comartrecovery.org). The World Jewish Council has been, by far, the most influential force for procuring the return of stolen Jewish art objects.

when the understanding and processes of reconciliation itself are altered. Specifically, this clearing can be promoted through: (1) the honest recognition of events that actually scar and promote ugliness; (2) the naming of those responsible for such actions and holding them accountable for their solution; (3) the removal of figures who wield dominating power; (4) the commitment to presence and perseverance despite inevitable failures, and to the narratives and rituals that establish common ground; (5) the appreciation of the sacred nature of the disjunction and emptiness that encompass every momentary and individual act of reconciliation; and (6) the removal of financial barriers that obstruct reconciliation.

Christianity's relevance to contemporary Western society can be enhanced by turning to postmodern thought as another end/pointing. One significant contribution is the stubbornly realistic understanding of reconciliation that it offers for consideration—namely, that reconciliation is a process of intersubjective play, that it is delicate, fragmentary, and momentary, and that total harmony cannot be historically realized. Another resource is the work of Mark C. Taylor. Although one may certainly object that his a/theological program is incompatible with traditional Christian theology and his reading of twentieth century art and architecture—like all *interpretations*—is selective and reinforces his own hermeneutical circle, Taylor's writings deserve our attention since he is one of the leading and most creative figures in postmodern American religion. Taylor takes the postmodern human condition seriously and raises a monolithic challenge to the business-as-usual doing of theology—such a challenge can have positive and lasting effects. For example, in recent decades mainstream theologies have found similar constructive openings/endings in theologies of liberation and difference. The encounter, while painful and messy at times, has nevertheless added a richness to theological dialogue and perspective. Indeed, postmodern thought demands that the dominant view be informed and altered by Other perspectives.

A final end/pointing is toward aesthetics as a resource for theological method. Having grown considerably in the last three decades, theological aesthetics offers great possibilities for creatively re-imagining the Christian faith for a postmodern culture that exhibits considerable aesthetic sensibilities. Reconciliation is but one doctrine that can be figured and refigured on the common ground of aesthetics.

# **WHY IS EVANGELISM IMPORTANT IF ONE CAN BE SAVED WITHOUT THE GOSPEL?**

by

**Eric Manchester**

The commitment to evangelism in the Wesleyan tradition is beyond question, to the point that to call John Wesley's own evangelistic fervor "tireless" is almost a trite understatement. Yet for a tradition so driven by the desire for the salvation and improvement of souls, Wesleyanism differs from many evangelistic traditions in that it has not typically assumed that all people who die without knowledge of the Gospel are necessarily condemned. Many Wesleyans seem to prefer the view that the "heathen" will be judged by how well they have lived according to the natural law as it is written on their hearts, or in opening their hearts to a sense of love that, unbeknownst to them, comes only from the Holy Spirit through Christ. This raises an obvious question: If salvation apart from explicit knowledge of the Gospel is possible, then why is evangelization so important?

The task here is to reconcile the importance evangelism can make with the possibility of salvation outside explicit knowledge of the Gospel. This will be done by examining briefly Wesley's attitude toward this possibility and suggesting that he seems to favor the view that the prospects of salvation are diminished, though not eliminated, for those unfamiliar with the Gospel. This will involve an analysis of Wesley's notion of conscience, whereby the conscience required both for moral living and for an awareness of one's own sinfulness is seriously hampered if one does not have anything beyond oneself to look to for ultimate meaning. This is in keeping with Wesley's own hierarchy of faith positions, which range through



different Christian traditions to other theistic religions, to pagan moralism, and to atheism. Finally, it must be clarified how this position can be reconciled with our *prima facie* notions of fairness that those who have not been exposed to the Gospel are somehow have less of a chance of salvation than those who have heard the Good News.

The effort to reconcile the importance of evangelism with the possibility of salvation outside of the Christian tradition involves a claim that, while salvation is less likely for those who have not explicitly heard the Gospel, the degree of faith such people must exercise is significantly less than for those who have had ample opportunity to know Christ directly. My argument maintains, consistently I believe with Wesley, that faith requires a fundamental existential decision as to whether to live life on the assumption that there is no life beyond this one, and thus no ultimate morality or purpose to our actions, or on the assumption that our life is lived with eternal significance toward a greater good. It is in this decision that our free will is manifest, though always with the aid of grace.

Moreover, inasmuch as the essence of salvation consists in surrendering one's control over life and trusting in something beyond oneself for ultimate meaning, the Christian message is the best suited to motivate one toward such a decision since it alone provides an adequate example of God's love for us in the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. The further removed a worldview is from such a conception of God, the less likely it is that one will look beyond oneself for meaning, thus making salvation unattainable. On the other hand, while those exposed to the Gospel have greater reason to look to Someone beyond themselves to give their life ultimate purpose, this knowledge also requires one to let go of one's own self-lordship and place trust in God to a greater degree than one who knows little or nothing of Christ's salvific plan. In short, it is less likely in terms of *odds*, but also less demanding in terms of *effort*, that one who has not heard the Gospel will surrender his or her own will to the point needed to make salvation possible. At the same time, without reason to believe in a purpose beyond oneself and beyond this life, one has little incentive to exercise faith even to this lessened degree.

### **Wesley on the Possibility of Salvation for Those Unfamiliar with the Gospel**

Those who extend the possibility of salvation beyond explicit knowledge of the gospel of Jesus generally do so on the ground that it seems unfair

that a person can be condemned through knowledge they lack from no fault of their own. Also, there are people who do not explicitly accept Christianity but nonetheless exhibit Christ-like love in their lives. Of course, this phenomenon is not limited to people who have never heard the Gospel. It occurs for people who have heard and embraced many of the Christian ideals but perhaps fall short of accepting all of its theological ramifications. There are even people who may reject all notions of religion, but still dedicate much of their lives to works of charity and compassion. It has been said that people who are open to the “love” of Christ, and have perhaps “accepted Christ” in this way, even if they have not made such an acceptance intellectually, are (as in the work of Karl Rahner) “anonymous Christians.”

Wesley’s own view on the possibility of salvation for the “heathen” is not entirely unambiguous, though his most direct statements seem to acknowledge the possibility. On the other hand, a reading of several of his statements suggests that he may find it much more difficult for one without the Gospel to experience salvation, and definitely that the sanctified life is much rarer, if not unknown, among people without such knowledge. I will consider three areas in which he addresses the state of those who have not heard the Gospel. The first is in his account of justification by faith in Christ, the second is in his account of pagan (humanistic) virtue, and the third is in his analysis of moral conscience. In respect to the issue of justification, I will go further in demonstrating that Wesley appears to hold out a greater degree of hope for those who acknowledge the reality of God in some sense than for those who reject the notion of God altogether; in this sense, his consideration of salvation for those ignorant of the Gospel is narrower than what is often referred to in “anonymous Christianity,” which seems to show as much optimism about the eternal prospects of “good-hearted” atheists as it does for members of non-Christian theistic religions.

**Ignorance of the Gospel and Justification.** In respect to justification, Wesley declares in his sermon *On Charity* that those who have not heard the Gospel are not “under the law” in the way that those who have heard are, and that we “are not required to determine anything touching their [those who have not heard] final state,” so that “how it will please God, the Judge of all, to handle them, we may leave to God himself.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>*On Charity*, section 1, paragraph 3. *Sermons*, vol. 3, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 295. All notes are taken from Outler’s edition unless otherwise specified.

While this statement does not explicitly acknowledge the possibility of salvation for “the heathen,” Wesley expresses slightly more hope for this in the next lines when he notes that “He is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that he is ‘rich in mercy to all that call upon him,’ according to the light they have; and that ‘in every nation’ he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.” These opinions are reiterated in *On Living Without God*, where Wesley states that he “has no authority from the Word of God ‘to judge those that are without’” the “Christian dispensation,” and that he does not “conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometans in the world to damnation,” it being “far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is ‘the Father of all spirits of the flesh.’”<sup>2</sup>

Wesley initially appears to say something different in *Justification by Faith*, although a closer reading reveals that he is consistent in his position on the status of those who have not heard the Gospel. While he does say that faith is required for justification, and that faith is to be understood as “a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us into His favour, for the merits of Christ’s death and passion,” and that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,”<sup>3</sup> he qualifies such remarks by saying “I speak of those to whom the Gospel is preached, for ‘what have I to do judge them that are without?’”<sup>4</sup> Finally, in his *General Spread of the Gospel* he states his conviction that every person has received numerous opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit, and to make a fundamental choice between eternal life and death.<sup>5</sup>

In *On Faith*, Wesley establishes a hierarchy of “degrees” of faith.<sup>6</sup> Here he says that atheists have the lowest degree of faith (for reasons examined in the next section), with deists placing just before them. Then there are the heathens who have a belief in a Higher Power, such as possibly the Native Americans and the Mahometans (Muslims). Next, there are the ancient Jews, Roman Catholics, and various Protestants who may emphasize faith while understating the importance of works. Wesley

---

<sup>2</sup>*On Living Without God*, sec. 14, from 1872 Thomas Jackson edition, as found at the website for the Wesley Center of Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University (no further bibliographic data available on site).

<sup>3</sup>*Justification By Faith*, sec. 4, para. 3-5, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 192.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 4 para. 4, 195.

<sup>5</sup>*General Spread of the Gospel*, sec. 12, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 489.

<sup>6</sup>*On Faith*, sec. 1, paras.1-10, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 493-495.

makes it clear that these are just basic generalizations, and do not uniformly apply to every person in each group; for example, he mentions a work allegedly by an Arab Muslim that “contains all principles of pure religion and undefiled.”<sup>7</sup> He also notes the holiness of a particular Catholic bishop. In all cases, however, it is not clear that Wesley’s acknowledgement of the possibility of salvation for those outside of Christianity is meant to be extended to atheists.

**Humanistic Virtue Without Knowledge of the Gospel.** While admitting the salvation apart from Gospel-knowledge is possible, Wesley by no means concedes that the prospects without the Gospel are as good as those who have it, nor that they can attain an equivalent life of holiness. Indeed, Wesley regards theists who do not know Christ as having virtue less than fully pure, while suggesting that the general run of “heathens” and members of other religions come close to lacking virtue altogether. Moreover, he is especially skeptical about the prospects for virtue among those that disclaim God.

In a somewhat more subdued tone than suggested in previously cited statements, Wesley exclaims in *The General Spread of the Gospel* that the heathen world is filled with moral and “intellectual darkness” and “vice and misery,”<sup>8</sup> as well as general violence and brutality.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, he suggests that humanistic virtue, though perhaps producing good effects, is not *truly* good in that it is separated from a faith in Christ, and is therefore inadequate for overcoming the temptations of the flesh and overall improving the condition of humankind.<sup>10</sup> He comments that even the wisest of pagans erred in seeking virtue partly in themselves and partly in God (many leaving God out of the question altogether), saying “so dim was the light of the wisest of men, till ‘life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel.’”<sup>11</sup> The works of those who deny God altogether apparently lack in goodness even more. In his sermon *Living Without God*, Wesley compares the atheist to a toad that has lived in total darkness; the atheist “tastes nothing of the goodness of God.”<sup>12</sup> Throughout *The Almost*

---

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 1, para. 4, 494.

<sup>8</sup>*General Spread of the Gospel*, sec. 1, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 485-486.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, secs. 2-3, 485-486.

<sup>10</sup>*The End of Christ’s Coming*, Introduction, sec. 2, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 472.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Introduction, sec. 3-4, 473.

<sup>12</sup>*Living Without God*, secs. 3-8, Jackson edition.

*Christian*, he acknowledges that those who seek to live a moral and upright life out of a commitment to happier living is indeed noble on a human level, but lack the purity of heart of the Christian if their lives are not painfully aware of the inadequacy of their own righteousness and filled with a burning love of God and neighbor.

**Conscience and the Non-Christian.** In his work *On Conscience*, Wesley accepts a roughly intuitionist account of conscience. He says that nearly all people are endowed with a faculty whereby, upon being conscious of their actions, thoughts, or deeds, become aware of their correspondence to or violation of what is good and their praise and blameworthiness.<sup>13</sup> Even this conscience, however, is said to be not strictly natural, but placed in us by God through Christ. This idea supports the notion of “anonymous” Christianity insofar as it holds that people may be guided by Christ without realizing it. It involves the entire person in incorporating rational recognition of an action, moral evaluation of that action, and a sentiment properly corresponding to the action.<sup>14</sup> While all conscience is guided by the Holy Spirit, Christian conscience goes further in explicitly acknowledging the relationship of one’s action to the will of God, particularly in respect to rules for living elucidated in Holy Scripture.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that the conscience of one who has heard the Gospel is necessarily better informed than one who has not. It is also important to note that just as Christ is said to illuminate our conscience, the Holy Spirit is given credit for aiding us in the nurturance and continuation of this conscience (sec. 1,12).<sup>16</sup>

This approach affirms that conscience is capable of greater scrutiny when one is explicitly aware of Christian teaching than when one is not. Though Christ and the Holy Spirit may be working in one who has not heard the Gospel, giving some understanding of holy living, Wesley’s comments on humanistic virtue and the quality of life among even virtuous “heathens” indicates that this holiness is limited by the fact that, without explicit knowledge of the gospel, one is unlikely to be fully aware of one’s own inadequacy to overcome sin, and is necessarily unaware of the One to whom he or she must yield to resolve the problem of sin.

---

<sup>13</sup>*On Conscience*, sec. 1, para. 3, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 481.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 1, para.7, 483.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 1, para.11, 485.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 1 para.12, 485.

These thoughts are echoed in *On Faith* when Wesley refers to a great Indian chief who acknowledged that missionaries knew more of religion than did his people because the “white man” possessed “the great Word,” whereas his people did not.<sup>17</sup> Hence, one might infer from these reflections that, if salvation apart from gospel knowledge requires the sustenance of a conscience that prompts moral action, and such conscience is aided by a belief in the inadequacy of one’s own abilities and the need to rely on Something absolute beyond ourselves to give this conscience purpose and meaning, then the more limited one’s knowledge is of the possibility of this Something (Someone) the more likely it is that he or she will choose to rely entirely on oneself and live only for oneself. This state, however, renders salvation impossible.

### **Lessened Accountability and the Value of Evangelism**

**What Makes for Lesser Accountability?** Why is evangelism important if one can be saved without such knowledge? This question has been partly answered; in gaining knowledge of Christ, one is strengthened by the ability to recognize moral shortcoming through improved conscience, and thus better be able to experience the love and joy of Christ-like living. And yet Wesley’s concern for the spreading of the Gospel, and his general repugnance for the wickedness discovered among the “heathen” and Muslims, leaves one to suspect that he saw those without the gospel message in grave spiritual danger. It has already been explained that those without the Gospel are not held accountable to the moral law in the same way as those who have heard, though they are still under the limited scrutiny of an underinformed conscience. Thus, less is expected of them. At the same time, it is clear that Wesley expresses serious concern for their state, and sees evangelism as a pressing need.

The urgency of evangelism can be made consistent with the lessening of accountability if one considers the possibility that, while one who has not heard the Gospel is expected to be less aware of his or her own sinfulness and the need for forgiveness, the likelihood that this necessary self-renunciation will occur at all is diminished without the gospel. Salvation requires both that one be aware of one’s own moral shortcoming and be aware of the need of someone beyond oneself to rescue from this shortcoming. One who knows of God but not Christ may grasp this to a point.

---

<sup>17</sup>*On Faith*, sec. 1, para. 3, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 494.

Without an awareness of the sacrifice God made for us in Christ, however, such a person cannot adequately comprehend the love of God, and is therefore ignorant of the degree to which God is able and willing to offer such assistance. One may have a hope in God, but lack a confidence (as in Wesley's description of faith).

Since it is easier to have hope than confidence (which involves expectation, and not just acknowledgement of possibility), we may say that something less difficult is required of the person who has not heard the gospel. It would be more correct, however, to say that this is not less *difficult* (as it requires acting without adequate knowledge), but that it does involve a lesser *degree* of faith. We might say that, relative to one who has heard the gospel, the faith required of the "heathen" is proportionately greater, though less in terms of the extent in which it must actually be present in one's consciousness compared to one who knows directly the love of God. On the other hand, even with this lessened requirement, a person who has heard no evidence of the possibility of overcoming death may quickly conclude that this life is the only good there is, and hence, that we may as well live to maximize what benefits ourselves without regard for others. This selfish conclusion would pose a grave danger to the salvation of such a person, even if it is somewhat understandable given their ignorance of Christ. This is not to suggest that salvation is by works, of course; nevertheless, it at least requires the "work" of letting go of one's own control and trusting in the power of God.

In a way, conscience only makes sense if there is eternal accountability; if it is purely sentimental, there is no *prima facie* reason why we should cater to these sentiments to not harm others if we realize that we can gain something for ourselves in harming. As Nietzsche has said, if there is no God, then all things are permitted. As Wesley himself alludes in *The End of Christ's Coming*, the intrinsic value of virtue for its own sake (divorced from an awareness of almighty God) carries little weight compared to the pleasures of immediate gratification. He states, "All that can be said of the beauty and advantage of virtue, and the deformity and ill effects of vice, cannot resist, and much less overcome and heal, one irregular appetite or passion."<sup>18</sup> Reason and philosophy are both thus largely impotent in showing us a reason to resist our own sinfulness and hope for

---

<sup>18</sup>*The End of Christ's Coming*, Introduction, sec. 3, *Sermons*, vol. 2.

a way out.<sup>19</sup> Hope without evidence of a reason for hope may quickly come to be looked upon as foolishness, at which point it becomes much more practical, and from a human perspective reasonable, to live for the now and not bemoan in ourselves what we cannot overcome.

If salvation for the unsaved requires some kind of regret and wish for a way to be forgiven and improved in one's condition, it is harder and harder for one to cling to this attitude the longer one goes without evidence of something which can provide an aid to the soul. It becomes easier to fall into what essentially amounts to despair and an embracing of the pleasure of the sinful moment that we know we enjoy, the only moment that we know we have. Thus, while only hope without confidence and only limited awareness of one's own inadequacy are needed for openness to Christ's love and the Holy Spirit in one who has not heard the gospel, even this limited requirement may become quickly ignored.

It may be asked how one can be accountable for failing to maintain adequate awareness of one's own moral unacceptability, and the fact that he or she needs something beyond the self for deliverance, if he or she is not at fault for lacking the evidence of Christ that would help sustain this awareness that stirs the search for salvation. The point here, however, is not about what is *fair*, but what is *possible*. Though from a humanistic perspective there is a certain kind of cynical rationality to nihilistic embracing of one's own aggrandizement in a world with very limited awareness of God, it is spiritually impossible for the Holy Spirit to reside in a place that is closed off to Him. Insofar as God allows all people some evidence of the goodness of life, no one is without some basis for hope, and therefore no one is fundamentally cut off from the possibility of opening up his or her heart enough to receive salvation.

Since any opportunity God grants for salvation is a matter of grace, the fact that some experience less goodness than others is not fundamentally unfair (as in unjust); furthermore, it is not even proportionately unfair in that while there may be less motivation for such a person to exercise the degree of faith needed for justification, the degree to which one commits to this faith is mitigated by his or her ignorance. All people retain the free will needed to act on the light they are given. It is in this free will that accountability arises for all people, increasing for those who have greater awareness of the Gospel.

---

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



**Free Will, Conscience, and Accountability.** The connection between accountability, free will, and the importance of the Gospel becomes clear when one considers the source of human free will and its relation to conscience. Though Wesley does not analyze free will as I am about to, I believe it is consistent with what he preaches and is very helpful in reconciling the aforementioned aspects of the human condition before God.

Thinkers like Thomas Aquinas<sup>20</sup> and Socrates<sup>21</sup> are essentially correct when they say that all people act toward what they, at the moment of action, perceive to be a good—that is, what they perceive to be something that will contribute to their human happiness. This insight is similar to those cited earlier from Wesley on the nature of pagan humanistic virtue, whereby people’s motivation to approximate holy living primarily stems from a desire for their own well-being. At the same time, Wesley and I would agree that our knowledge of what is for our own well-being is hindered by the fact that we have imperfect knowledge. For the most part, this ignorance is the result of the Fall. However, I believe that this limitation of knowledge is natural to the human condition and what made the Fall possible in the first place. Humans live in time, and as such, learn inductively. Thus, we cannot in this life ever attain an *absolute* (i.e., deductive) certainty of the connection between particular actions and final outcomes. In this sense, we do not have absolute knowledge that eternal life is possible or that there is a final benefit in holy living. Hence, every action can be treated as something that we are doing only for the sake of temporary pleasure or as something we do with a view to eternity.

Those who act for temporary benefit may, as the virtuous pagans do, act for the sake of achieving a well-balanced life into old age, which may provide some motivation for temperance and self-control. On the other hand, we do not even have absolute knowledge that we will live beyond this moment, and hence it is possible for us to despair and nihilistically live as though this is the last moment of our lives and there may be *no* consequence whatsoever for our actions. In this scheme, then, our free will aris-

---

<sup>20</sup>E.g., *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, chapter 37.

<sup>21</sup>In Plato’s *Meno*, for example, it is considered that virtue cannot be taught, and that it must therefore be a type of recollection; therefore, one who lacks virtue must be forgetful or ignorant, of it. A similar concept is developed in the *Republic* when the virtuous guardians are described as those who know “what is good in itself” (i.e., “the Good”).

es from the fact that we are inescapably in a position to decide whether to live our life as though there is eternal accountability, or to live as though this life is all there is. Nothing determines us in this choice; we are free.

A choice to believe in future accountability is a choice of faith, whereas a choice to live as though there is no further significance to our actions signifies the utmost of nihilism, despair, and sin. But even within a choice of faith, there is a need to understand that it is not in our own power to have adequate knowledge of how to live, or to know how to attain this knowledge. In this sense, Christian conscience grounded on the Word of God gives us greater wisdom than we could attain purely on our own, just as Wesley suggests. Hence, a person who is not Christian is still exercising a degree of faith in his or her willingness to believe, without certain evidence, that there is a purpose in trying to live morally. One who makes this decision with a belief in the eternal significance of his or her actions makes a more difficult decision (as there is less evidence for this), and thus could be said to be exercising greater faith.

The faith of non-Christians, then, increases as one is inclined to believe in eternal life, which generally is associated with a belief in some kind of God. An atheist, on the other hand, has adopted a point of view that nullifies a sense of eternal significance to action, and thus his or her actions are based on little or no faith. Atheists may still do moral actions from compassionate impulses, but there is no worldview which can rationally sustain a sense of purpose in these actions, and thus, there is no willingness in such a person to acknowledge the need, or possibility, of Something greater than themselves to give even these charitable actions meaning or to enable them to persevere in such actions.

If we look at Wesley's tripartite analysis of conscience as involving reason, moral awareness, and proper sentiment, the atheist at best may have the third aspect of conscience, with at most an incomplete and rationally unsupported vague sense of the other two aspects. A belief in God provides an invaluable piece of rational evidence of the moral significance of one's actions, that in turn greatly increases the likelihood of sustaining the proper sentiments and sustains in acting from a good conscience. This impetus of reason and moral evaluation in spurring moral sentiment, which inclines us to moral action, is maximized in the case of one who is aware of God's own ultimate loving nature, and willingness to sustain us, through the example and sacrifice of Christ. One who knows the Gospel story, then, has the greatest motivation both to believe in the eternal consequences of

his or her actions and to accept the possibility of help in achieving moral living.

One implication of the above analysis is that, while faith should be easier for one who has received ample evidence of a final good and a final purpose in one's actions, there is also a greater expectation placed on one to exercise such faith and sustain it. A person who has received very little evidence of a final good, on the other hand, has much less reason to believe in a final good and eternal significance for their actions, and so less is expected, though it is still impossible for him or her to receive saving help without opening up to some (unknown) degree to a faith in goodness and significance. Skepticism in the uninformed person is thus more easy to overlook, but complete cynicism would constitute despair and hence the impossibility of salvation. Wesley's confidence that all people, no matter how bad their lives, have numerous opportunities to exercise faith in basic goodness is supported by the fact that even the worst life is not without any sense of goodness; indeed, as an Aquinas would point out, life itself is recognized as a good,<sup>22</sup> and so even a hope in something better (even in the face of little evidence for it) is possible and a sign of faith. But total despair lacks even hope, and thus renders salvation impossible. Hope is always possible, and therefore one is always accountable for choosing it.

A further implication pertains to those who have heard the gospel, or otherwise received substantial evidence of the goodness of life. One who has enjoyed many of life's gifts has more inductive evidence that there is a final good, and thus should have an easier time exercising such faith. This means that a lack of faith in such a person is less excusable, and also that the degree to which one must be willing to commit his or her life to such faith is far greater. This is especially true for one who has heard the gospel and frequently experienced the benefits of that love (such as from the love of others), though there is also much accountability for one who has not heard the gospel but has otherwise received much evidence of the basic goodness and purpose of life. As Scripture phrases it, much is required from whom much is given. The sin of Adam and Eve was most serious in

---

<sup>22</sup>Aquinas writes, for instance, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, chapter 37: "All action and movement would seem to be directed in some way to being, either for the preservation of being in the species or in the individual, or for the acquisition of being. Now this, namely, being, is a good . . ." (as quoted in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. II, A. C. Pegis, ed., New York: Random House, 1945).

that it showed not only a lack of confidence, but an outright distrust in God—God had given them Paradise and yet they still chose to believe and act as though there was still something good He had held back from them. Such an action is the height of ingratitude. And the sin of Satan, for the same reason, is greatest of all.

On the other hand, to whom little is given, little is required—but the odds of anything of what is required being yielded decrease, as such a person has less and less reason to trust in even the possibility of Something beyond oneself. For a person who has received little awareness of love, then, even a small gesture of charity, seemingly insignificant to us, may require far more courage, hope, and faith in ultimate Goodness than we can ultimately fathom. For all we know, a drunkard in the street giving another drunkard a pack of cigarettes may be demonstrating more hope and faith in the reality of selfless goodness, in light of his own suffering, than what ostensibly seem to be much greater sacrifices. But the odds that a person in such a state may be unwilling to perform even this act of charity, focusing entirely on oneself, are far more probable; it is easier to live beyond oneself when one has reason to trust the world.

Only God knows ultimately what actions constitute an act of hope, and trust, and faith. We do know that such trust is far more likely to be offered, in even the smallest degree necessary for salvation, by one who has not only heard the gospel, but benefited from the loving actions of those who proclaim it. As Wesley says, it is then that “the holy lives of Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist.”<sup>23</sup> In short, while faith which justifies may be sufficient for one who has little or no exposure to the Good News, for those of us who know the Good News abundantly, acknowledging our own weakness and the need for Someone to help us is not enough—if we truly have faith in this goodness, we will accept it as truth to a point that cannot help but lead our conscience to pure sentiments leading to charitable action. That is, for *us*, the awareness and trust placed in justification is not enough. Our knowledge must manifest itself in a process of total self-surrender; we must be *sanctified*.

---

<sup>23</sup>*General Spread of the Gospel*, sec. 22, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 491ff.

# **BETWEEN RHETORIC AND PRACTICE: PURSUING RECONCILED COMMUNITIES OF THE SPIRIT**

by

**James W. Lewis**

On Race Relations Sunday or in other community-wide worship celebrations, Christians see preachers engaging in pulpit exchanges and black, white, hispanic<sup>1</sup> and other Christians, coming together in one place. The place pulsates with an air of expectancy, if for no other reason than a sense of the novelty of it all. Important things may happen, but soon all go their separate ways, deferring Christian unity to some unknown future. The rhetoric of Christian unity, while valuable, falls agonizingly short of truthful practice. While I celebrate all efforts to live in the spirit of Christian unity, all Christians should sense the moral indictment inherent in speaking more confidently about unity than actually living it. Rhetoric is fundamentally what we say and how we say it.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, living “between” rhetoric and practice is equivalent to a “pursuit.” Such pursuit then captures both the reality of the church’s ambivalent existence [division] and its assent that God does call us to live in unity with each other.

---

<sup>1</sup>This author is aware that the term “Hispanic” is inclusive of many groups and may not include “Mexicans” or some other people groups. I use the term “Hispanic” in a generic sense.

<sup>2</sup>There is much written about the nature of rhetoric, both ancient and contemporary. I am addressing the most basic dimension of “what we are saying about a subject” that should logically unfold into practices which correspond to it, but does not. Hence, rhetoric finds no place to land within the concrete contexts of human experiences.

Christian unity should be seen as synonymous with the notion of a “reconciled community of the Spirit.” It is a fundamental belief of Scripture that those who follow Jesus constitute a community. John Wesley believed that Christianity is not intended to be lived in isolation from others: “. . . Christianity is essentially a social religion; and . . . to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it.”<sup>3</sup> What contributes to the dissonance between rhetoric and practice is an often distorted view of community. It is not just any kind of community to which the church should aspire.<sup>4</sup> God’s call is to a “reconciled” community of the Spirit.

The Church of God movement (Anderson) has much to contribute to contemporary discussions about Christian unity.<sup>5</sup> This movement’s twin distinctives of Christian unity and biblical holiness position it to help other Christians experience the unity of all believers. But there are some factors, even in this movement, that impede an experiencing of reconciled communities of the Spirit. What follows identifies these factors and some implications that might help communities of faith to experience afresh the reconciling Spirit and the truthful practices of God’s new community. Inter-ethnic or racial reconciliation is a key moral issue with important ecclesial implications. But first, we need clarity about the Church of God movement.

No contemporary movement should be so presumptuous as to claim that it is the sole voice on issues of Christian unity. The early first-century Christian communities certainly can lay claim to identifying Christian unity as integral to the gospel. Any contemporary reflection on Christian unity must be in conversation with the living tradition(s) of the Christian past. A long and broad view of history is necessary. Some attention should be given to this history as a way to provide critical perspective on the

---

<sup>3</sup>From *Sermons I*: 381f; Wesley as quoted by Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, translated by W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), footnote 2, 184. According to Marquardt, “Wesley explicitly rejected the religious self-satisfaction of the believer and any restriction to a personal I-God connection; this was one of [Wesley’s] essential objections to mysticism” (121).

<sup>4</sup>The increasing globalization of the world and its manifestation within the United States certainly require the inclusion of other ethnic groups in our discussion. However, the scope of this paper centers on the historic black-white paradigm, since it represents a continuing dilemma and an unfinished agenda.

<sup>5</sup>This is not new in that the Church of God Reformation Movement has been in conversations with the Christian Church. I want to affirm this, but I am arguing for more than a coming together that leaves each group essentially unchanged.

nature of the church as a new and reconciled community of the Spirit. Gerhard Lohfink provides a compelling account of God's actions in history.<sup>6</sup> This is the kind of account that is biblically faithful, theologically imaginative, and truthfully compelling. This account of God's dealings in history extends in a faithful way the more limited renderings of the biblical story articulated by many denominational historians and theologians. It is my belief that to recapture a passion for reconciled communities of the Spirit requires a view such as Lohfink's.

### **A Theological (Normative) Narrative of the Reconciled Community of the Spirit**

Gerhard Lohfink has produced an exceptional work on God and history, specifically God's purposes through Israel and the church. For many North American Christians who require that the worship of God be entertaining and spontaneous, this kind of God may be a bit too tame and boring. However, Lohfink does not succumb to the excesses of the common cultural entrapment by values alien to God's reign. The Trinitarian God *needs* the church because God wills the world's salvation only in the context of human freedom and continual growth. While God desires the salvation of all nations, this desire would remain amorphous and abstract if it found no place to land. Lohfink's argument consistently unfolds in the direction of a radical particularity, from God's election of Israel in the Old Testament to God's election of the church through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Lohfink says, "For Jesus, the reign of God is also tangible and visible. It does not simply exist in human hearts, nor is it hidden somewhere beyond history. It can be seen already, touched, acquired, traded. For that very reason it can fascinate people and move them to give up everything for the sake of this new thing without thereby losing their freedom" (47).

For contemporary Christians who lament the church's disunity, Lohfink's provocative reading of salvation history gives us reason to hope that the Spirit can act powerfully today. The not-yetness of God's reign does not necessarily mean its deferral to some future time. According to him, in Mark 1:15, "'the kingdom has come near' cannot mean that the time of fulfillment has not really come yet. It is true that 'has come near' contains an element of 'not yet,' but that has to do not with God's action

---

<sup>6</sup>Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press, 1999). All page numbers included in the text.

but with Israel's response. At this moment Israel has not yet repented. . . . Jesus' hearers would prefer to put everything off to some future time, and the story comes to no good end. The time is indeed fulfilled, but God's *basileia* is not accepted. The 'today' God offers is disputed, and so that 'already' becomes 'not yet' " (135, 136).

Lohfink's poignant discussion of salvation in the New Testament maintains the emphasis on both God's sovereign election and Israel's human freedom. The "already-not yet" of the kingdom of God is the resistance of the "not-yet" from the human side against the superabundant "already" of fulfillment from God's side (139). Jesus and the new society—the eschatological new society (the emerging church)—growing up around him embodies the limitless generosity of God (153). God's overflowing fullness is manifest, according to Lohfink, in none other than the reality of the church's concrete existence. Jesus' bodily resurrection possesses consequences for the church (207). The church is also a "body." "It is visible, palpable, tangible. It is socially organized" (207). The church cannot exist invisibly or reside only in the hearts of the faithful. It is a tangible reality. To be "in Christ" cannot be construed as only an individual transaction with God through Jesus. It is to be inextricably in community, with real brothers and sisters, being the foretaste of God's eschatological new people. They practice a new lifestyle in a reconciled community.

For Lohfink, the *ecclesia*, the called-out assembly, is the gathering of no less than the *people of God*. Gathering is a fundamental feature of the church (218). As the book of Acts summarizes the history, this assembly lives publicly in the world, living its life as God's just society and sustained by its desire for consensus discovered through the praise, prayer, and power of the Holy Spirit. According to Lohfink, the "public" nature of the *ecclesia* indicated that "they did not see themselves as a group of like-minded friends and also not as a group of people . . . joined together because of particular interests" (218). Instead they were created by God and had an interest in all things. The assembly's very nature was construed as a public assembly of the *whole*. Although conflicts arose in the community, they did not resort to violence, but rather to finding solutions by consensus.<sup>7</sup> Lohfink defines unanimity as "allowing oneself to be placed by God on a new footing, what Paul in Philippians 2:1-5 calls 'sharing in

---

<sup>7</sup>These conflicts in the book of Acts arise both from within and outside the communities of faith. If consensus was not reached, the decision was postponed.



the Spirit' and 'being in Christ.' This new basis is made possible by Jesus' surrender of his own life, which Paul speaks about . . . in Philippians 2:6-11" (236). The church is understood to live through and in its concrete gatherings where unity of the whole church is preserved.

These concrete and continuous assemblies would not constitute the church just by their gathering. "Among the Church's most precious possessions is the knowledge that of itself it is incapable of bringing about even something *resembling* a community, and that when it attempts to do so in spite of that knowledge the effort yields nothing but dead-end rivalries. . . . [T]he center that sustains everything and that it cannot make of itself . . . is a gift: the Spirit of Jesus. Only from this center can it find unanimity, and that unanimity is then its entire strength" (222-23). Lohfink believes that it is in such assemblies where "the community can ask, again and again, what its way is to be, what is its next step, what is God's concrete will for it" (235). In such a practice of public unanimity, construed against the notion of "democratically organized church," is God's hope for gathering the separated from all nations. The tension of the "already-not yet" of God's kingdom is still experienced even among the baptized.

The Pauline form of the *people of God* is the *body of Christ*. In opposition to religious individualism, Christian salvation involves incorporation into the church as a social body.<sup>8</sup> One can have communion with Christ *only and always* in communion with others" (255, emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup> In Paul's indictment of the Eucharist practiced by the Corinthian congregation, he identifies the fundamental principle of community: "that each esteems the other above himself or herself (Phil. 2:3)" (259).

The unity of the body of Christ is not achieved by humanistic appeals to solidarity or brotherhood or sisterhood, since rivalries between individuals, families, groups, and nations are much too strong. Rather, the community lives from "the dying and rising of Jesus" (260). Christian unity does not obliterate differences. The body of Christ, therefore, must rest on that which preserves the "virtues" of difference, without destroying socie-

<sup>8</sup>Lohfink juxtaposes the distinct social reality of the church against the religious individualism fostered by the mystery cults of the Greco-Roman world, especially the worship of Eleusis. While "salvation" was promised and given directly to the initiate, it had no corresponding social consequences (234).

<sup>9</sup>Strict proponents of western individualism will find this claim a bit too strong for their taste. However, the church construed on this basis has succumbed to the logic that its existence is like a fraternal society of those who *already* believe—apart from the church (Lohfink, 254).

ty. It rests entirely on freedom, voluntariness, and on the belief that differences are a means to mutual enrichment (261).<sup>10</sup> *Agape* binds together that which otherwise would drive to disunion. The gift of the divine Spirit released through Jesus' surrender of his life makes possible what is impossible through human agency alone. The church's *wholeness* is its undivided, exclusive worship and obedience to the God of Abraham and Jesus of Nazareth. In the gospels and the Pauline letters, this theme of wholeness is promoted as central to the unity of the body of Christ. This wholeness refers not only to local communities existing currently, but also to those throughout the history of the tradition. Furthermore, it speaks to the universality of the church's mission since salvation and the lordship of Jesus over the universe occurs *through the Church* (cf. Ephesians; Lohfink, 282-290). The reconciling power of the Spirit and the presence of peace exist where Jesus is head, including in the church.<sup>11</sup>

This extended summary of Lohfink's theology provides a compelling vision of the church. In locating unity in the worship of the Triune God—the God who creates the world and yearns for its redemption, the church trumpets the ongoing importance of Christian unity as intrinsic to its life and witness. Several church groups have recognized the centrality of unity as indispensable to the witness of God in the world. As Barry Callen says, “The Stone-Campbell movement (the Disciples) . . . from early in the nineteenth century had perceived most of the same dilemmas and proposed some of the same solutions that later would characterize the Church of God movement.”<sup>12</sup> However, what is it about the Church of God (Anderson) that positions it to offer substantive insights to the wider church's pursuit of Christian unity—the reconciled community of the Spirit?

---

<sup>10</sup> Unanimity does not mean uniformity. Uniformity can be achieved, if at all, only through coercion and violence. To insist on uniformity requires the subordination of difference under some totalizing discourse that promotes deception and hypocrisy.

<sup>11</sup>It is important to affirm the lordship of Jesus over heaven and earth (cf. Matthew 28:19). The Church is to acknowledge and embody the lordship of Christ as a witness to the worldly powers that their status as would-be “rulers” is absolutely false and coming to a certain end.

<sup>12</sup>Barry L. Callen, *Contours of a Cause: The Theological Vision of the Church of God Movement (Anderson)* (Anderson, Ind.: Anderson University School of Theology, 1995), 22. See also Barry Callen and James North, *Coming Together In Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1997).

## The Church of God Reformation Movement: Wedding of Holiness and Unity

Daniel S. Warner is accorded the status of the principal (human) founder of the Church of God movement (Anderson, Indiana). Although many church groups go by the name “Church of God,” Warner intended the name to convey his belief that the church belongs to God and not to any cadre of humans and their institutions. My purpose in this section is not to re-tell the story of its birth and growth, for that would move us far afield. There are several sources that can orient the interested reader.<sup>13</sup> I will focus primarily on the movement’s “distinguishing” doctrines of biblical holiness and Christian unity. From its inception, the movement’s intent has been “to give priority to the presence and governing power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Warner did not warm initially to holiness teachings. He bristled at what he saw as disturbing hypocrisy in many of the holiness devotees he knew. However, being ever receptive to the Spirit’s leading in his life, Warner appeared to bring together in his person the long-held convictions about church divisions and heart holiness.<sup>15</sup> There was “an urgency about a God-ordained mission in the ‘last days.’ The themes of unity, holiness, and biblical prophecy blended and were conveyed powerfully by the preaching skill of Daniel Warner.”<sup>16</sup> Warner’s life and early struggle to “reform” his own Indiana Holiness Association is akin to a “principled search” to recapture authentic Christian unity and biblical holiness.

<sup>13</sup>Two of the classic historical accounts are: Charles Ewing Brown, *When the Trumpet Sounded: A History of the Church of God Reformation Movement* (Anderson, Ind.: The Warner Press [Gospel Trumpet Company], 1951; John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1980). More recent contributions are from Barry L. Callen: *It’s God’s Church! The Life and Legacy of Daniel Sidney Warner* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1995; *Following the Light: Teachings, Testimonies, Trials and Triumphs of the Church of God Movement, Anderson* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 2000).

It is important to acknowledge that the Church of God movement is not distinctive in highlighting holiness and unity. These themes, in conjunction with others, help to define a peculiar consciousness within which these become distinctive. For example, John W. V. Smith highlights eight doctrines characterized as “distinguishing” for this movement. For Smith, all these eight doctrines are thoroughly Christian and Scripture-based. [John W. V. Smith, *I Will Build My Church: Biblical Insights on Distinguishing Doctrines of the Church of God* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1985), 2-4.

<sup>14</sup>Barry L. Callen, *It’s God’s Church!*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

**A. Holiness.** Many church groups who take Scripture seriously will affirm holiness to some degree. However, the Church of God movement has “a stronger emphasis and a sharper focus on the doctrine and practice of holy living than is true in most church groups.”<sup>17</sup> One cannot fully appreciate the Church of God at its best without realizing its commitment to utter dependence on the Bible truths as personally experienced through the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

The scriptural admonitions to be “perfect” are often translated as to be “mature” or “fully grown.” Being mature carries the notion of “responsible adulthood, a readiness to fulfill the purposes for which one is created.”<sup>19</sup> For John Smith, the New Testament writers mean by “perfection” a spiritual maturity, perfect love, heart purity, victory over any intentional wrongdoing.<sup>20</sup> Absolute perfection was not intended, but rather a release from the reigning power of sin. This victory over the power of sin is not a human achievement, but an empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Smith further elaborates:

Receiving the Holy Spirit into one’s life as a “helper” is a way of describing the experience of sanctification that has been so strongly emphasized in the Church of God and in other holiness groups. . . . Living a life under the direction of the Holy Spirit means living with victory over sinful desires and temptations.<sup>21</sup>

The Church of God movement does not view the doctrine of holiness as an abstract theological concept. It is to be expressed in actions, attitudes, and aspirations. Biblical holiness is to encompass the purity of all life. A holy lifestyle by definition could not be truncated to simply an inward piety, although that dimension is certainly present. Holiness then is sustained in community. This community of the sanctifying and cleansing

---

<sup>17</sup> John W. V. Smith, *I Will Build My Church*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> The last stanza of D. Otis Teasley’s 1901 song *Back to the Blessed Old Bible* says:

Back to the blessed old Bible, Back to the Master’s call,  
Back to the words of our Savior, Loving, obeying them all.  
Never in sects to be scattered, Never again to do wrong.  
*Unity, holiness*, heaven, Ever shall be our song. [emphasis added.]

<sup>19</sup> John W. V. Smith, *I Will Build My Church*, 82.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Spirit is a holy community called church. One verse of a well-loved heritage hymn of the Church of God says: “Oh Church of God, one body is. One Spirit dwells within. And all her members are redeemed and triumph over sin.” The Church as the holy, transformed community fundamentally evokes the idea of the church’s essential unity.

**B. Christian Unity.** The early leaders of the Church of God (and many today) often spoke of “seeing” the church. The church they saw was a vision of God’s great plan for his people “as a mighty company made up of all redeemed persons on the earth.”<sup>22</sup> The church they saw crossed all human barriers, whether of race, color, nationality, caste, clan, class, sex, educational level, temperament, or culture.<sup>23</sup> Such a church bore witness to God’s love for all humankind.

While the church partakes of human characteristics, it is fundamentally a divine institution. It is an institution that is Jesus’ “primary continuing living presence in the world.”<sup>24</sup> It is also divine in that the Holy Spirit rules and governs the church.<sup>25</sup> The Church of God movement owes much of its origin to revivalistic Wesleyanism and experiential pietism; its view of the church is that of a dynamic organism. The church was and is more than a collection of individuals desiring only the satisfaction of their own needs and desires. The church is seen as “God’s people in community with one another.”<sup>26</sup> It is a community of holy people, governed and equipped by the Spirit, and witnessing to the world through the spiritual agency of reconciled believers saved across all human barriers. Hence, the church is a *visible* community of persons redeemed by God’s grace. The Church of God movement attests to God’s ownership by insisting that only “persons who had experienced the new birth were already members of the Church.”<sup>27</sup> This visible community of believers is indeed a reconciled community. It is a community of the Spirit who gifts the community with unity. The earliest Church of God reformers believed that God was calling

---

<sup>22</sup>Smith, *I Will Build My Church*, 91.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 100.

them to proclaim and model the visible earthly expression of the one, holy, catholic church. God does not have churches, but *a* church.<sup>28</sup>

Jesus' prayer in John 17 serves as a pivotal passage for the call to Christian unity: "That they all might be one." The Church of God reformation holds, in the face of pervasive divisions in the church, that God wills the unity of all God's people. It is to be a unity (community) created by Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Warner affirmed that holiness and unity are inseparably linked, with unity being the beautiful fruit of perfected holiness. As a result, the Church of God reformers shunned any organization, seeing all such attempts as the human promotion of "sectarianism." History reveals, however, the continuing struggles of the Church of God to live up to its ideal of Christian unity. Forthright assessment of its struggles is a necessary activity of moral vigilance.

**C. How is This Movement Doing?** The Church of God (Anderson) possesses a biblically defensible and theologically grounded doctrine of unity and holiness. Like most church groups, however, it has experienced the gnawing discrepancy between fundamental teaching and concrete actions. There is much to commend the movement. It is linked with the wider church tradition, especially with the Radical or Believers' Church tradition.<sup>29</sup> Historically, it has been one of the more inclusive church bodies. While the early reformers may not have spoken explicitly much of the time about racial issues, they faithfully heralded the message of holiness and Christian unity. Many blacks heard the message and embraced the hope of the message and the commitment of its messengers. Is rhetoric important? Yes, there is no need to dismiss the message. But there still is a problem.

The problem is a shared one with Christendom as a whole. It is a problem characterized by the continuing, persistent, and embarrassing deficit created by the distance between our rhetoric of unity and our prac-

---

<sup>28</sup>James Earl Massey rightly reminds us, however, that "[w]hile some critics are still saying that we must look for the Church beyond the churches, it must also be reported that some have seen the Church because of the churches" (*Concerning Christian Unity: A Study of the Relational Imperative of Agape Love*, Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1979), 91.) If Massey is responding against a tendency to affirm the "invisible" church as the true church, then Massey's warning is proper. If he wants only to put a positive spin on the church's many faces, he still must respond more fully to Lohfink's critique of the church's historical division.

<sup>29</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1999).

tice of it. On a macro-level, the moral problem is disunity in the global church. On a micro-level, the moral problem often gets described as sins within congregational life. The Church of God (Anderson), on a macro-level, experiences a somewhat unified national and global structures. However, there is a great deal of diversity [oftentimes division] among various groups in the movement. The Church of God has experienced some separation in its history. It is amazing that the movement has remained together, despite broad differences. For example, there is the great diversity among believers in non-Western societies, as well as the strong influences coming from the National Association of the Church of God (a predominantly African-American constituency in the United States), the North American ministries center in Anderson, Indiana, a fellowship of pastors and congregations in the lower Midwest, and the ever-growing Spanish Concilio. Unity is a complex challenge. Disunity is a pervasive reality.

**D. Does Race Still Matter?** While our nation has established an annual celebration of Black History month and many celebrate the strides made in race relations, these great strides are still insufficient. This is particularly true in reference to the church. “Racial fatigue” and chronic denial still plague the collective psyche of both Christians and non-Christians. To quote an often used cliché that still happens to be true: The 11:00 hour is still the most segregated hour in America.<sup>30</sup> The problem appears virtually intractable, so that we are goaded into believing that we should not expect too much in this present life.

Barry Callen’s insightful overview essay in a recent publication is titled “Realizing the Ideal.” It captures for the Church of God its rather ambivalent responses to its own vision and existence.<sup>31</sup> It has championed unity, but been dogged by incidents of disunity and cultural accommodation. Its General Assembly in North America has passed several resolutions over the years pertaining to race and race relations, all biblically informed and culturally relevant. Yet the movement’s polity, more autonomous than interdependent, mitigates against any sustained optimism that such resolutions might temporarily inspire within us. This is illustrated by the length

---

<sup>30</sup>I am fully aware of many reasons that engender separation besides race, such as denominational loyalties, socio-economic realities, gender and sexual orientation issues, etc.

<sup>31</sup>Callen, *Following the Light*, 18-55.

of time for some separate state assemblies (black and white) to merge into one. There still exist in many states separate assemblies. Also, there are some states where the separate Ministerial Fellowships have merged, but the state assemblies embodying the congregations remain separate. Even the Women of the Church of God, who have often led the way on many social issues, have experienced recalcitrance in a few states in the call for them to unify their racially separate womens' groups. This is a moral problem that hits at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

As a member of the wider church, and living out my life in the group of people known as the Church of God (Anderson), I am blessed to be a part of these people as we worship the Trinitarian God on behalf of the whole church. Yet I am saddened by the continuing presence of the vestiges of racism in the life of the Church of God. This grief is especially wrenching given the historic message, heralded for over a century, of unity of all God's children and holiness of lifestyle.

Thus, I argue that the rhetoric of Christian unity in the Church of God (Anderson) is the right one, but the practice of unity is frustratingly inconsistent. The reason for the inconsistency is not simply because people are human or live between the times. Rather, the inconsistency is nurtured by forces that array themselves against the working of the Spirit to empower the church's effort to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace. Proclamation fails to produce its intended purpose when the church does not serve the Spirit's goal of orchestrating *concrete* practices of unity within God's new community. Believers should embrace the articulation of Christian unity from ecclesial traditions like the Church of God (Anderson), but go beyond rhetoric to practice for a radical assent to the demands of the Spirit to be one. We must seek to overcome the glaring schism between rhetoric and practice through a radical re-appropriation of the power of the Spirit. We cannot be content to assume that God is going to make everything come out right in the end. To be passive is to legitimate divisions among believers. Gerhard Lohfink gives this scathing denunciation of the passive posture:

There are theologians who make a virtue of the painful fact of division and assert that the many churches and confessions reflect, like a thousand facets, the richness of the Christian reality. There is certainly an element of truth in that: all the churches that have gone their separate ways have brought to light elements of faith that were affirmed onesidedly,



obscured, or covered over in the Catholic Church. Even all the serious sects have reminded the Church unmercifully that faith demands . . . the genuine community of the faithful.

And yet, the thesis that all separations simply be explained and even trans-figured

. . . as the “richness of variety” not only contains a highly dangerous element; it is also unbiblical. The condition of Christianity at the present time is nothing like a colorful field in which wheat is growing and poppies and cornflowers are blooming; it is rather like a broken mirror that distorts the image of Christ. In light of the New Testament the splintering of the people of God cannot be regarded in any other way. There the question of divisions within the communities and within the Church as a whole was already present, and the answer given by New Testament theology is unequivocal.<sup>32</sup>

In our contemporary racist society in North America, Christians must be at least “bilingual”—good theologians and acute cultural critics. Without both the church is more easily captured by the logic and practices of a dominant culture than by the practices of an alternative culture called “church.” Here are some impediments that mitigate against the church’s witness of authentic unity and holiness:

### **Docetic Christians**

William J. Jennings describes the theological and practical problem for Christians as a docetism that haunts us in relation to race, culture, and the problem of racism. How often do we hear these responses from well-meaning Christians regarding race? “I don’t see anyone as black or white, just my sister or brother in Christ. There is no such thing as race, we are all one in Christ.” Or we say, “we just need to learn how to forgive, respect and live together and go on to the future.” Or we say, “where I was raised there were no black people; therefore race was and is not an issue for me.” Jennings characterizes all such statements as docetic. This quote by Jennings indicates what docetism means in relation to our views on racism:

Our docetism in matters of race surfaces in our articulation of a social redemption [rhetoric] that is beyond the actual realities and operations of our humanity [practice]. Our docetic ten-

---

<sup>32</sup>Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?*, 297-98.

dency is not merely our inability to deal with human “differences.” Our docetism in matters of race comes to light in our desire to see racial harmony and peace [rhetoric] without the actual transformation of identity rooted in the real conversion of our forms of social existence and community [practice].

These kinds of statements [those listed above] commonly found in the mouths of Christians exhibit the worst kind of theological deception. Here we claim a commitment to a changed perspective [rhetoric] without the requirement of any significant display of that commitment [practice]. Such ways of speaking and thinking exhibit the total denial of any Christological mediation that would shape the way we live and that would demand a way of life that indicates the seriousness of Christian transformation. Here we exhibit the foolishness of Western individualism as it deceives us into thinking that a changed heart means a changed world.<sup>33</sup>

This keen observation is particularly astute. It seeks to unmask the power of the deception inherent in particular construals of the faith. Holiness and other groups who endorse a more inward piety or individualistic approach to the Christian life are especially encouraged to heed the warning of docetic tendencies. A personal appropriation of faith is not the same as a private faith. I lament the great disconnect between an individual’s personal convictions (or beliefs) and the social embodiment of those convictions in faithful practices. There is a serious moral problem inherent in the passionate preaching and testifying of many Christians, especially white Christians, when it is not mirrored in correlative relationships and institutions.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>William James Jennings, “Wandering in the Wilderness: Christian Identity & Theology Between Context & Race,” an essay in *The Gospel in Black & White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation*, edited by Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 46-47.

<sup>34</sup>Implementing a strategy focused on outward acts without the corresponding inward transformation by the Spirit is just as pernicious. Life in a reconciled community of the Spirit must resist the idea that the church can be content only with outward acts of piety. Manfred Marquardt says that “Wesley distinguished between the outward performance of good [powered by prevenient grace], which was not without value but nonetheless provisional, and the performance of good that followed the inner renewal by God’s grace, prompted and shaped by love. Only this latter activity should . . . be characterized as good. Only a person who acted out of love was really doing good.” [*John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*. Translated by John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1992), 103-104]. Hence, we need not therefore insist on a radical separation that too often accompanies much of evangelical and fundamentalist theologies.

The early pioneers of the Church of God movement rightly saw the church as a “visible” reality of Christian unity. But the movement’s revivalistic and experiential focus has tended to marginalize in reality what has been vigorously embraced rhetorically. The church appears to be an appendage to what many now see as the most fundamental spiritual reality—the *salvation of individual souls*. This mode of discourse opens any movement to the seductive logic of Western individualism that centers the individual and de-centers the community. We then become, on Jennings’ terms, more “docetic.” This “virtue” of western society encourages the church’s captivity to alien powers embedded in the dominant culture. The community of believers is in danger of being seduced.<sup>35</sup>

Rodney Clapp ventures the view that the “heresy of white Christians” may result in destroying the faith of others. He says that

. . . if white, racist Christians have rarely denounced the doctrine of the Trinity or Christ as Savior, they have often embodied and practiced their faith in such a way that others, whom they subjugated in the name of that faith, could not themselves come to affirm orthodox doctrines. The heresy of white Christianity, then, is one of distorting and deviating from truth in such a way that even if it does not destroy your own faith confession, it effectively prevents or destroys the faith confessions of others.<sup>36</sup>

The experience of the reconciled community of the Spirit is impeded by a distorted view of power. When we say “power of the Holy Spirit,” what do we intend?

---

<sup>35</sup>Philip D. Kenneson probes in a provocative way just how dominant aspects of our liberal democratic society serve to undermine the cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit within Christian community. See *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup>Rodney Clapp, *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 190. Clapp references a quote of Daniel Payne, elected bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1852. “Payne notes a typical response of a runaway slave, of whom Payne inquired if he were a Christian: ‘No sir,’ replied the runaway, ‘white men treat us so bad in Mississippi that we can’t be Christians.’” [Clapp, 190-91. Quoted from James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1972, 1991), 22-23].

## The Power of the World vs. the Power of the Holy Spirit

The Church of God reformation, along with other Wesleyan/Holiness traditions, promote a thoroughly biblical view of the Holy Spirit. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit can transform the heart and empower us to love. The problem, however, is subsequently acting in ways consistent with the will and purpose of the Trinitarian God. The Church of God movement has promoted a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that features the call to continued growth and transformation in holy living. This maturing and empowering function of the Holy Spirit often is impeded by perverted surrender to certain cultural realities.

Academic theologians enjoy a certain amount of power made possible by the separation of the academy from the church. A power of analysis that emerges from the perceived hegemony of objective and detached analysis is always tempting. The problem becomes the subtle ways in which reflections are shielded from the churchly practices that authorize them. Worshipers in local congregations can be held captive to ways of thinking that insulate them from the truthful demands of the gospel. Theologians and biblical scholars should dare to help Christians tell the truth about their temporal existence. An urgently needed truth involves facing the divided Church and feuding Christians with the sin in their communal and individual lives.<sup>37</sup>

I agree with Barry Callen's affirmation of the Believers Church tradition. In comparing this tradition with "liberation theologies" and contemporary evangelicalism, he properly critiques "liberation" theologies for their "optimistic world view." Their "[focus] on the power of God and the potential of the *transformation of this present world by concerted Christian action* (emphasis mine)" fuel this optimism. While I do not argue with his conclusion, I hope that the reader might also have an appreciation for the positive contribution of liberation theologies. A strength of such theologies is their potential to critique oppression, affirm the humanity of the oppressed, and evaluate the experience of the oppressed as a source and criterion for truth. Therefore, any premature dismissing of liberation the-

---

<sup>37</sup>I am reminded of James Cone's polemical theology, *God of the Oppressed*, aimed at the hegemony of Eurocentric theology. While Cone certainly could do theology in that form, he de-legitimated its implicit claim to construct reality. Such theology tended to be so abstract at times that it promoted the status quo, thereby leaving those on the margins of society virtually consigned to subordination to the powers of the world.

ologies may lead to an unintended marginalization of those who lack power—the poor, the widow, the children, minorities, and women. Cheryl Sanders holds to the benefits of black liberation theology as “an invaluable starting point for discussion of the past plight and future prospects of the African American people.” She goes beyond the limits of black liberation theology in order to address its limitation.<sup>38</sup>

The ability to discern the experiences of others often is missing in our church communities, and it is especially necessary in a world where we are increasingly rendered incapable of “seeing rightly” and “acting justly.” Christians can be rendered morally blind even as they wax eloquent theologically. In the most “powerful” society on the face of the earth by most accounts, the language of national power often serves as the paradigm for the church’s language of power. In the wide-ranging field of Christian advertising and marketing, our view of power in the Christian life often is a Jesus very at home on Wall Street, in the Pentagon, or in the Oval Office. A case can be made for the tragedy of the church’s tendency to equate the power of the Holy Spirit with the power of the world.

To the extent we do not acknowledge this mutation of divine power, we align ourselves with the limited agendas of worldly powers and authorities. Does the kingdom of God really require intimate partnership with the Republican or Democratic parties? Does it really necessitate the literal enthronement of kingdom servants on secular thrones? While I am not suggesting that the church have no interactions with the world, I am suggesting that the form such actions take should be “Christian.”

Why speak in this way when there are competing visions in the gospels of Jesus’ identity? It is because the church in America too often defers to the image of John’s Jesus of glory rather than the image of Mark’s suffering Messiah. Jesus is presented as powerful, but Scripture affirms in a clear voice his marginal status, his powerlessness, his servant’s heart, his active though nonviolent engagement with the world’s powers, his penchant for self-sacrifice, even to death on a Roman cross. These descriptions do not exhaust who Jesus is. Yet they make the point that the contemporary church’s view of Jesus is a woeful caricature of the Jesus of Nazareth

---

<sup>38</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity: The Believers Church Tradition in Christianity’s History and Future* (Nappanee, In.: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 175; Cheryl J. Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People: A Path to African American Social Transformation*, Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 1.

revealed in the gospels. The power Jesus displays is imperialistic power turned on its head. Kenneson provides an excellent description of this radical Jesus who, in a culture of hubris and aggression, embodied the character of gentleness:

When John . . . looks for the conquering Lion who can open the scroll and its seven seals, he sees instead a Lamb. The Lion is the Lamb, and the way of the Lamb is the way of the cross. . . . When we look for a king born of royalty, we find instead a baby wrapped in strips of cloth lying in a manger, born to a peasant girl of no account. . . . When we look for Jesus to take the world by storm, to win over those who have power, influence and prestige in order to advance his kingdom more efficiently, we find instead an itinerant preacher and healer who spends much of his time with the weak and outcast of society: children, lepers, prostitutes and tax-collectors. When we see Jesus rejected by the Samaritans, we look for him to do what his disciples wanted done—to rain down fire upon them—but instead he rebukes *us*. When we look for the conquering hero to make his move, to enter into the royal city on his white charger to signal to the people that the time has come to establish his kingdom, we find instead a Jesus who enters into Jerusalem astride a humble donkey. . . . When we look for a deliverer who will crush the opposition by superior force, we find instead a servant-messiah who allows himself to be crushed and bruised for us. What kind of God is this?<sup>39</sup>

The power of the Spirit is the real presence and mediation of the life and character of this Jesus. The docetic captivity of much of Christianity and distorted notions of power impede our experiencing the reconciled community of the Spirit.

### **Recapturing the Radical Dimension**

Ecclesiology is central to my constructive proposals. The view of the church espoused here is its radical Christian character. The racial divide in the United States represents one of the most insidious social and spiritual problems facing the American church. Therefore, the Church of God (Anderson) and other Christian groups must passionately desire to exhibit to the world an alternative vision. The church is to be a sign of God's

---

<sup>39</sup>Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, 205-206.

eschatological reconciliation of the world, and therefore a community in which “there is no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal. 3:28; cf. Eph. 2:11-22). Through the cross one new community (humanity) is created (cf. Eph. 3:9-10; 4:3). According to Richard Hays:

Insofar as the church lives the reality of this vision, it has a powerful effect in society; insofar as it fails to live this reality, it compromises the truth of the gospel. . . . The continuing racial separation of America’s churches in the 1990s is a disturbing sign of unfaithfulness that can only reinforce the racial tensions abroad in our culture.<sup>40</sup>

Racism is a heresy that issues the church a very pragmatic task. The task is to form communities that seek reconciliation across ethnic and racial lines.<sup>41</sup> Barry Callen says that the Believers Church “calls for rigorous discipleship, experience with the Holy Spirit’s power, biblical critique of contemporary culture, and the strategy of a new-community model of the church as a fundamental aspect of a holistic witness to Christ in the world.”<sup>42</sup> In a nutshell, Callen captures the nature of the kind of community in view here. The strength of this view is that it is biblically inspired and theologically faithful.

### **Embodying the Church’s Alternative Narrative**

Racist assumptions are bolstered by (pseudo)science and racist hermeneutics. The church and Christians in North America have accepted ways of seeing the world and its inhabitants from the perspective of a normative gaze—the gaze of Eurocentric privilege. A truthful telling of history in the United States reminds us of the church’s complicity in legitimating racist and exclusivistic social orders. The wedding of the church and its mission to the universal claims to power of nation-states is always problematic. Hence, Rodney Clapp is correct to argue that now “[it] is the community called ‘Church’ that teaches people the language and culture that enables them to know Jesus as Lord. And it is the Church in the fullness of its life—not primarily its arguments—that draws others to consider the Christian faith.”<sup>43</sup> He insists that if we quit foundationalist rhetoric we can

<sup>40</sup>Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 441.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Callen, *Radical Christianity*, 175-176.

<sup>43</sup>Clapp, *Border Crossings*, 29.

claim the specifics of the Christian tradition and forthrightly speak the name of Christ in any public forum. A necessary focus on the radical nature of the church, Jesus, and discipleship can position Christians to identify and counteract practices sustained by other [racist] narratives.

### **Re-Visioning Holiness**

A re-visioning of holiness along the lines proposed by Stanley Hauerwas might provide just the perspective that would permit authentic transformation within a transformed community. The church in the United States often mirrors the polity of the nation-state. It reflects the radical individualism and broad liberties characterizing our social order. While a notion of the “common good” certainly is valued, it is not considered prior to the dominance of the free individual. The church in the United States also reflects the rationality inherent in a national polity that encourages us to forget the particularities of our histories and the traditions that birthed us. Consequently, such ways of thinking render any notion of “community” as essentially a collection of self-interested individuals. In a society that honors radical individualism, the experienced reality of being the “people” of God is minimized.

Racism depends on notions of power that inscribe the logic of superiority-inferiority on the collective psyche. It is the kind of logic and practices that cater to radical individualism and group loyalties sustained by worldly power. Thus, Hauerwas’s proposal offers an alternative to this entrenched individualism and rationalism.<sup>44</sup> The community or “body” of Christ is to be a sanctified community of the Spirit where old “selves” are transformed into a new body. In this new body, the church, racism is illogical because it has no place within the bounds of a sanctified body. This view of the “body of Christ” not only permits but requires a reversal of the worldly (racist) logic of superiority-inferiority.

The church’s view of itself must be changed. Viewing the body of Christ as constituting a mathematical collection of individual bodies is biblically and theologically unacceptable. The racist rhetoric and ideology is supported by Holiness people who view the “physical” body and its external characteristics as determinative for naming the identity of other people

---

<sup>44</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, “The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does Not Require a Self,” a chapter in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 80. [All other page references in the text above.]



and groups. The hegemony of racism is broken as both its rhetoric and corresponding practices are transformed by the presence of Jesus through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Since racism requires communal legitimation on some level, its eradication requires an alternative legitimation within a *new* community—a reconciled community of the Spirit. When the body of Christ norms our individual bodies—bodies that respond to liberal individualism, then we learn the reality of each person being a member one of another. The “over againstness” assumed in racist ideology is rendered illogical and thereby is stripped of its power. Hierarchical structures no longer are inevitable, but rather structures based more on the mutuality of relationships intrinsic to the body of Christ. In this communal context, there lies the eschatological hope for our individual transformation in relation to God and the other. This view is wholly consistent with the biblical vision of unity given in Ephesians 2:11-22 and Galatians 3:28.

### **Taking Seriously the Notion of Power Within Relationships**

The church cannot escape the notion of “power” in its varied dimensions. It is rather what kind of power is intrinsic to the Christian community. James McClendon reminds the church that “Christian obedience is challenged by a world of power as surely as it is framed in a world of nature.”<sup>45</sup> According to John Howard Yoder, “the faithful Christian ‘community’ will not ask whether to enter or to escape the realm of power; rather it must ask, ‘What kinds of power are in conformity with the victory of the Lamb?’”<sup>46</sup> The power of the “Lamb” is the form of power that is more truthful to the story of faith. There are other forms of power that are antithetical to the gospel.<sup>47</sup> There are many forms of power in the world and the church is not immune from being dominated by them. Therefore, the church must exercise moral responsibility in its relations with others

---

<sup>45</sup>James McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 177.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*; quoted from John Howard Yoder, “The Stone Lectures,” 28.

<sup>47</sup>James McClendon refers to what he calls “powerful practices” or “corrupt practices.” He further equates the New Testament’s principalities and powers as the social structures we may also identify as (MacIntyrian) practices (173). *These structures may be religious* (173). McClendon suggests that wherever Christ’s victory is proclaimed, the corrupted reign of the powers remain in being. While they are not destroyed nor abolished in between the times, they are “disarmed” or “dethroned” (175).

and must be sensitive to the ways in which persons are ordered in relation to the goods of a community.

Power and knowledge are intimately related. At this point, caution is required even in the rhetoric we use. The rhetoric of unity and racial reconciliation can be linked to forms of power that mitigate or obscure any truth it promotes. Communal practices can be “powerful” or “corrupt” practices. Joel Shuman says that “the most significant characteristic of knowing in modernity is the role given to the subject, the ostensibly detached observer.”<sup>48</sup> Further, the object of thought, whether another person, thing, or God, “always maintains an element of strangeness and is never brought fully within the conceptual boundaries maintained by the thinker.”<sup>49</sup> The subject seeks always to manipulate the object of thought to conform to the subject’s conceptual boundaries. Human “knowing” becomes power or a type of power. The church is cautioned to discover the ways in which our articulation of “truth” and “doctrine” serves to mask our will to exert power on others in both conscious and unconscious ways—all in the name of Jesus the Reconciler. The church is called to an openness to subjugated knowledge, which may be just the kind of humility required to set the Spirit free among the community of faith.

If this analysis bears any truth, then power is embedded in relationships among peoples and their contexts. A battle for the truth may be the offshoot of a strategy of struggle. Christians who truly desire authentic reconciliation within our contemporary contexts should be conscious of such power dynamics that order relationships and create knowledge that energizes it. Like Yoder and others, Shuman interprets Foucault as saying that “it is not a matter. . . of emancipating truth from every system of power (for truth is already a power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.”<sup>50</sup>

Walter Wink argues that many Christians have been rendered passive, cowardly, or complicit in the face of injustice because of their wrong sense

---

<sup>48</sup>Joel James Shuman, *The Body of Compassion: Ethics, Medicine, and the Church* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1999), 29. Shuman discusses the relationship of knowledge and power in his effort to show how medicine and bioethics have exercised the power of expert knowledge to define the body and health in ways that eclipse the narrative of the Church community.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 44; quotes Foucault, *Truth and Power*, 133.

that Jesus' commands are impractical idealisms.<sup>51</sup> Many Bible translations have followed the lead of the King James interpreters by inbreeding passivity, subordination, and monarchical absolutism (entrenchment of the status quo) into Jesus' commands found in the Sermon on the Mount. Wink concludes, *contra* many other biblical interpreters, that "Jesus abhors [both] passivity and violence as responses to evil."<sup>52</sup> For Wink, Jesus' response is a "creative moral response"—a third way—that empowers the powerless and disarms the powerful. This third way is the opposition to evil without mirroring evil.<sup>53</sup> Wink's approach to violence might be useful in identifying creative approaches to the expressions of power that challenge Christian unity. He clearly addresses and analyzes power and frees Jesus from captivity to human agendas.

## Conclusion

The Church of God (Anderson) holds a view of Christian holiness and unity that potentially can contribute meaningfully to the unity of the church. Yet, in its current state of relative captivity to certain impeding cultural assumptions, there must be a reorientation to the Spirit's power to create new communities. The church must recapture its status as a radical church, serving a radical Jesus in radical ways.<sup>54</sup> Our skills of discernment must be enhanced so that we might be emancipated from the power of sin and corrupt practices it engenders, individual and collective, cultural and systemic.

This conversation must continue. Life in a reconciled community is buoyed by Christian hope, but not by denial. Our conversation must be real and truthful, or else we remain in the tentacles of demonic powers. Let us be bold in our convictions, humble in our spirits, and gracious in our actions and words. Let us also embody the virtue of truthfulness, the command for justice, and the practice of forgiveness, which we are commanded to extend to others willingly as it is extended to us by grace. Note Willie Jennings' challenge to the church—for those whose passion is that we all be one:

---

<sup>51</sup>Walter Wink, "Jesus' Third Way", a chapter in *Transforming Violence*, eds. Herr & Herr (Herald Press, 1998), 34.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>54</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1999).

We need a church made up of people who refuse to live out racial politics, who refuse to participate in the racial realities of this nation, who refuse the power and privileges of whiteness, who reject the stereotypes of blackness, who claim a new way of life born at the cross and the resurrection, who will not be known even by family, tribe, friends or nation after the flesh, but who would know themselves only through the power of resurrection and the call of the cross of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Jennings, "Wanderings in the Wilderness," 48.

# ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND: MEMORY AS KENOSIS IN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

by

Christopher P. Momany

In Exodus 2:22 Moses reveals the conflicted nature of his self-understanding. He states, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land” (NRSV). The immediate context for this confession is, of course, his expatriation from Egypt, but the statement bears more enigmatic meaning. This Moses has only recently begun his journey toward authentic self-awareness as a member of the Hebrew people. His appropriation of alien status is a statement of geographical dislocation. But it is also the painful ownership of true identity in the wake of his inauthentic familiarity with an adoptive culture. In the words of Walter Brueggemann, Moses had become “a fugitive from Egyptian order and power.”<sup>1</sup> Remembering who he is leads Moses to empty himself of privilege, much like the power-dynamic implied in the concept of *kenosis*.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 704. I am aware that the language of “aliens” brings to mind a host of interactive potential with the work of everyone from Stringfellow to Hauerwas/Willimon. Yet the Exodus story presents a different point of departure when juxtaposed with the New Testament imagery adopted by many postliberal theologians. The distinctions in thematic emphasis are at least as important as the similarities. Here I am exploring “alien” metaphors not as a means to develop a specific type of ecclesiology but to tease out the implications of hospitality and affirmation that might hold possibilities for a contemporary holistic engagement with the world.

<sup>2</sup>While Philippians 2 is the obvious reference, it is not my aim to develop a detailed exegetical treatment of kenotic themes with any kind of exhaustive attention to several texts and the theological agendas of various interpretive schools.

What shall we make of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement's struggle with issues of power? What kind of witness best articulates a coming to terms with our own history and an active engagement with the future?

This paper will explore one ethnographic trajectory of nineteenth-century American Protestantism and trace the development of class-consciousness, cultural dominance, and philosophical presumption. It will pay particular attention to the combination of (1) assumed Anglo-Saxon superiority, (2) the "spirit of capitalism," and (3) ethical consequentialism. It will then identify the rise of the nineteenth-century Holiness movement as a challenge to this environment of ruling power and achievement. Finally, it will suggest a theological shift in temperament that might invite the Holiness tradition to appropriate and transform its historic witness to power. Contrary to the perceived "negativity" of nineteenth-century holiness thought, this contemporary response offers to express itself through an unconditional affirmation of the human person.

### **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Consequentialism**

In the history of western ethics, 1785 stands as a watershed. That year Immanuel Kant published his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and William Paley released his *Moral and Political Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup> Through the early era of the American republic and through the voices of several sources, these two competing schools of moral thought would engage one another with opposing principles of value. The 1780s also mark the move of my French ancestors from the Detroit area to land south, along the Lake Erie shore.<sup>4</sup> This last observation may mean little to others, but it provides an historical micro-paradigm through which to view the growth of Anglo-American Protestantism, aggressive early capitalism, and philosophical consequentialism.

Until the War of 1812, my French Catholic ancestors lived placid lives along *La Riviere aux Raisins* near present Monroe, Michigan. The larger French/British/American history of the Great Lakes region is somewhat inscrutable. In many ways it accepted hierarchical, unjust social relationships. Wealthier Europeans of the Detroit area often embraced the

---

<sup>3</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) and William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785), in *The Works of William Paley*, D.D. (Philadelphia, 1831), 21-165.

<sup>4</sup>Russell E. Bidlack, *The Yankee Meets the Frenchman: River Raisin 1817-1830* (Lansing: Historical Society of Michigan, 1965), 4.

practice of a premodern-style slavery, and those of us who claim European ancestry in the region must confess and own this reprehensible legacy.<sup>5</sup> By modern standards, it was a crude culture that harked back to feudal times. It was also a “precommercial” environment that lacked the systematizing of later economic power.<sup>6</sup> Though bearing the undeniable impact of their European identity, by most accounts the French who moved to the River Raisin lived in harmony with their Potawatomi neighbors, receiving the privilege of land use from gifts or exchanges. In 1788 the “ribbon farm” of my grandparents, Louis Jean and Agatha, became the site of a rustic parish church, *St. Antoine a la Riviere aux Raisins*. Like their Native American sisters and brothers, these French *habitants* are remembered as an independent and yet unpretentious people. One regional historian recalled that those on the River Raisin were content with quiet lives and did not embody “excessive exertion for the sake of gain or the rapid accumulation of wealth.”<sup>7</sup> This tranquility changed after 1812.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The year 2001 represents the 300th “birthday” of Detroit, and only now is the region grappling with its painful history of slavery. The popular press has brought some aspects of this story to the fore. See Bill McGraw, “Slavery is a Quiet Part of the City’s Past,” *Detroit Free Press*, 22 February 2001, 1A and 8A.

<sup>6</sup>Melvin G. Holli, “French Detroit: The Clash of Feudal and Yankee Values,” in *The Ethnic Frontier: Essays in the History of Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d’A. Jones (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 73-95.

<sup>7</sup>Isaac P. Christiancy, “Recollections of the Early History of the City and County of Monroe,” *MPHC*, VI, 373.

<sup>8</sup>The River Raisin region was devastated by armies and famine during the War of 1812. Most of my ancestors became, in effect, war refugees from 1812-1815, living off of the graciousness of those in Ohio who would take them in. One late nineteenth-century writer looked back on these years with a mix of sadness and cultural prejudice: “The French at the River Raisin, who, with all their ignorance of farming, had had comfortable cabins, as well as fields and orchards which supplied their humble wants, were reduced to such penury on their return to their farms that even very meagre food was obtained with difficulty. They lacked the nervous tension and vigor which tones up the American pioneer to resist expected danger and surmount difficulties. Light-hearted and cheerful in all ordinary trials, their easy-going dispositions, their unfamiliarity with the common devices which necessity begets in the frontier life of the inventive Yankee, their content with the past, and faith in the unearned blessings of the future kept them penniless and breadless when keener intelligence might have lifted them above want. The settlers near Detroit were in woeful straits, but everything seems to show that the French of the River Raisin were more ignorant and less thrifty than the *habitant* to the north, and upon them had come the extreme cruelty and destruction of the war.” See Andrew C. McLaughlin, *Lewis Cass* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1891), 90.

For English-speaking Protestants streaming west from New England and New York State in the 1820s, the French were backward and devoid of ambition, “a very indolent lot of people.”<sup>9</sup> Compared to the burgeoning Yankee ingenuity of New York farmers and Connecticut merchants, the *habitants* of the Great Lakes region fell short. New England religious notions about industriousness fueled a muscular culture of pioneer achievement that relegated my ancestors (and especially the Native American community) to the ranks of societal insignificance.

It is virtually impossible to rehearse my family’s history without hearing the echoes of Max Weber.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the twentieth century’s well-worn debate regarding Weber’s interpretive overstatement and lack of theological precision, one pauses when reading the generally accepted Protestant judgment upon one’s ancestors: “. . . their time was spent in idle frivolity, which is adverse to mental or spiritual culture.”<sup>11</sup> Recent scholarship supports my observation. While couched in the language of detached theological discernment, these attitudes betrayed an economic censure. As Wallace Genser writes, the French were viewed as subsistence farmers, with “social customs which were less than profit-maximizing,” and by some Yankee standards the only sin worse than impiety was inefficiency.<sup>12</sup> Yet beyond the sociocultural attitudes that gave rise to Anglo-Protestant denunciation, were there specifically theological and philosophical dynamics at play?

The traditional response to this question charts the history of Protestant/Catholic relations in North America and focuses on the diffuse culture of Protestant hegemony and its resistance to the social implications

---

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Russell E. Bidlack, *The Yankee Meets the Frenchman*, 8. This statement was made in a letter from Joseph Bradish to John Bradish, February 7, 1819.

<sup>10</sup>Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958). My intention is not to weigh the finer points of Weber, but simply to provide a moral/philosophical analysis that is aware of his general thesis.

<sup>11</sup>Elijah H. Pilcher, *Protestantism in Michigan: Being a Special History of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Incidentally of Other Denominations* (Detroit: R. D. S. Tyler & Co., Publishers, 1878), 11.

<sup>12</sup>Wallace Genser, “‘Habitants,’ ‘Half-Breeds,’ and Homeless Children: Transformations in Metis and Yankee-Yorker Relations in Early Michigan,” *The Michigan Historical Review* 24:1 (Spring 1998): 34.



of Catholic immigration. But this model presupposes a Protestant priority intent on defending against Catholic incursion. There were, of course, several narratives in which Anglo-Protestantism itself was the latecomer. One may suggest, particularly in these scenarios, that a combination of theological and philosophical principles provided the organizing ideology for an offensive (not defensive) crusade through the boundary regions.

The theological principles at play were placed along a continuum, with Calvinism at one end and Arminianism at the other. The philosophical/ethical principles were placed along a continuum, with teleology at one end and deontology at the other. While these moral frameworks have received detailed treatment over the years, I am simply understanding “teleology” as a description of those ethical philosophies that adopt an end or goal and then judge all action by its contribution or hindrance to progress toward that goal. Although “teleology,” as a modern moral orientation, is not technically identical with “consequentialism,” in a more general sense, I will be employing the language of “teleology” and “consequentialism” somewhat interchangeably.<sup>13</sup> By “deontology” I simply mean those ethical theories that do not adopt an end or goal as supreme and that refuse to judge all action by its contribution toward reaching some stated goal. Here I am cognizant not only of the traditional concern for universal rules but also of the emphasis on intrinsic values that need not be justified by reference to specific outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

The New England Protestantism that rolled through the upper Great Lakes in the early nineteenth century had its obvious roots in Calvinist theological soil. But at least since the days when Jonathan Edwards codified ethical theory as a “benevolence to being in general,” New England theology was correspondingly “teleological.”<sup>15</sup> The familiar lineage of Edwardsean successors (Hopkins, Bellamy, Taylor, et al) gave an even more pragmatic emphasis to “benevolence” as the ultimate yardstick of Christian virtue. Moral life consisted in aiming for and achieving pre-established good consequences, and these desired outcomes constituted a

---

<sup>13</sup>Most will reference C. D. Broad’s pivotal distinction between teleological and deontological theories in his *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1930), 206, 278.

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

<sup>15</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 3.

vision of the benevolent society.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, while New England thought may never have been “Arminianized” in any formal sense, few can dispute that Anglo-Protestant ideas emanating from the New England of the Second Great Awakening expressed a much stronger appreciation for personal agency than had been the case in the days of Edwards. This potent mixture of human initiative and consequentialist moral criteria was bound to display a passion for measurable results and controlled social progress.<sup>17</sup> My French ancestors never stood a chance.

The deontological ethic had its Calvinist supporters, those who decried both New England’s turn toward human ability and its teleology, but most of these voices were safely confined to old Princeton’s genteel retrenchment.<sup>18</sup> Deontologists of an Arminianized stamp were an eclectic bunch. Traditional Catholic moral theology, with its appreciation for human agency and deontic values, stood opposite the Yankee ethic. But by mid-century, the Wesleyan community’s inherent Arminianism entertained aspirations of class advancement that mirrored the ambience of New England triumphalism. The stage was set for an internal response to the Methodist embrace of teleological achievement, and the Holiness movement provided a forum for this response.

Allen Guelzo has argued that the holiness heritage owes much to New England in the form of Charles Finney’s theology of perfection.<sup>19</sup> This is

---

<sup>16</sup>The quasi-utilitarian tone of Samuel Hopkins is evident in the following statement: “Disinterested benevolence is pleased with the public interest, the greatest good and happiness of the whole.” See Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines* 2 vols., 2d ed. (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1811), 1:466. See also Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), 109-124.

<sup>17</sup>Even after correcting the less balanced aspects of his argument, it is difficult to dismiss Paul Johnson’s claim that many expressions of Protestant fervor and the economic agendas of industrial leadership colluded to create a religious and cultural environment that was “order-inducing, repressive, and quintessentially bourgeois.” See Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 138.

<sup>18</sup>D. H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 20-21.

<sup>19</sup>Allen C. Guelzo, “Oberlin Perfectionism and Its Edwardsian Origins, 1835-1870,” in *Jonathan Edwards’s Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996): 159-174.

true if one links Finney directly to the Holiness movement proper. But as James Hamilton and others have shown, Finney's ethic was consequentialist to the core—a derivative of New England thought perhaps, but not at all the kind of moral construct that drove the later articulation of holiness.<sup>20</sup> Associating Finney with the Edwardsean tradition fails to prove that Finney's teleologizing of Christian perfection represents any kind of authentic origin to that which we have come to call the Holiness movement. In light of this, how are we to make sense out of the moral orientation among later holiness people, and, more importantly, how should this ethic be evaluated today?

### A Decidedly Deontological Witness

Even if one grants to the pursuit of perfection at Oberlin beginning in the middle 1830s some prominent position in a genealogy of holiness, this does not in the least demonstrate any preeminence for Charles Finney's teleological views. The community of Oberlin may have resembled countless expressions of transplanted New England in disposition and crusading ardor, but its loyalty to specific, animating principles of philosophical ethics was demonstrably mixed. This divided identity is especially apparent in the relationship Finney bore with his Oberlin colleague, Asa Mahan.

Mahan hailed from Andover Seminary, but his ethical proclivities were a continent removed from the "disinterested benevolence" of New England. Epistemologically, he was a Scottish Realist, not uncommon for theologues of some varieties. But Asa Mahan expressed his intuitionism through a shrewd appreciation for Kant's form of deontological theory.<sup>21</sup> The upshot was a rigorous ethic that stressed intrinsic values regardless of calculated results. In fact, Mahan reserved a conspicuous section of his 1848 *Science of Moral Philosophy* for a detailed and public critique of Charles Finney's teleological ethic.<sup>22</sup> Others may now admire Finney's Edwardsean attempt to boil all things ethical down to some admirable end, but Mahan saw this as a dangerous reductionism that threatened to com-

<sup>20</sup>This identification of Finney as a representative of teleology is fleshed out in a number of places. The primary source is James E. Hamilton, "A Comparison of the Moral Theories of Charles Finney and Asa Mahan" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1972).

<sup>21</sup>D. H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 153.

<sup>22</sup>Asa Mahan, *Science of Moral Philosophy* (Oberlin, O.: James M. Fitch, 1848), 94-123. See also James E. Hamilton, "A Comparison of the Moral Theories of Charles Finney and Asa Mahan."

promise those values and universal principles that could not be justified through appeals to benevolence.<sup>23</sup>

In practice, this tension between Finney and Mahan played itself out in their respective activism regarding human rights. Charles Finney has been lionized by many of today's evangelical radicals as a major progenitor of contemporary social concern.<sup>24</sup> But in truth, Mahan was much more prophetic and unyielding around the burning issues of the middle nineteenth century, particularly antislavery and women's rights.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, Allen Guelzo offers a severe misreading of Mahan's differentiation from the rest of Oberlin. Mahan did not lead an errant strand of Oberlin Perfection toward the privatism and consumer consciousness of his day.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, he developed a version of holiness teaching that refused to compromise with the bourgeois rationalization of New England consequentialism. The contrast between Finney and Mahan serves as a helpful context for understanding the later development of holiness ethics. For all of the lore surrounding Charles Finney's influence upon late nineteenth-century holiness, it is something closely resembling the moral philosophy of Asa Mahan that emerges in holiness circles.

H. Ray Dunning has demonstrated that the holiness ethic of old can be described as far more deontological than teleological.<sup>27</sup> Dunning attributes this emphasis to the Holiness movement's concern for the instantaneous aspects of Christian perfection, as opposed to mainline Methodism's more developmental nuances. Additionally, he understands this deontolo-

<sup>23</sup>Asa Mahan, *Science of Moral Philosophy*, 110.

<sup>24</sup>See especially Ronald J. Sider, "An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern" in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1974), 13, 38, 41. This connection has been repeated intermittently since the early 1970s, and I have learned much from the ways in which it has helped evangelicalism recast its social witness. I am simply suggesting that it may be time for a sympathetic demythologizing of the Finney mystique.

<sup>25</sup>Christopher P. Momany, "Moral Philosophy and Moral Reform: The Ethics of Charles G. Finney and Asa Mahan" (M.Div. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1987). Edward H. Madden and James E. Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), 81.

<sup>26</sup>Allen C. Guelzo, "Oberlin Perfectionism and Its Edwardsian Origins, 1835-1870," 169.

<sup>27</sup>H. Ray Dunning, "Nazarene Ethics As Seen in a Theological, Historical and Sociological Context" (Ph. D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969). See also H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 33-37.

gizing of Wesley's eighteenth-century ethic as an unfortunate adaptation that coincided with the holiness environment's delineation of moral standards among a changing culture. Dunning adds his voice to others who have pointed out that Wesley's own vision of perfection emphasized the dynamics of continual growth in love, and this original processive predilection is presumed to correspond with a moral philosophy that must be described in teleological terms.<sup>28</sup>

Dunning's thesis forces us to examine what many have chronicled as an uninspired nineteenth-century departure from Wesley. The polemical turn toward deontological schemes in the early Holiness movement has bequeathed a legalistic legacy, but it also provided an alternative framework of intrinsic values for the disenfranchised and dispossessed who fell outside the calculated ends of ascendant teleology. As one whose family enjoyed the judgment of urbane New England, I would caution us not to disassociate ourselves from that which might have been both graciously available and countercultural in practice. There is a danger in seeking distance from our own nineteenth-century paradigms. The contemporary tendency to apologize for the tradition can internalize, in the words of Cheryl Bridges Johns, "the dominant narrative which marginalizes us."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, while Wesley's theology did express appreciation for the developmental characteristics of Christian perfection, I am not convinced that this qualifies him as a "teleologist" in the pure, Anglo-ethical sense of the term. It is one thing to lift up the lifelong process of growth in love. It is another thing to judge fundamental axiological questions by appeal to pre-established human goals, ends, and socially accepted outcomes. Wesley fits the first application of the term "teleological," but not the latter.<sup>30</sup>

Dunning cites Albert Outler approvingly: ". . . it is generally agreed, in the history of ethics and moral theory, that deontology and Christian

<sup>28</sup>H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 35.

<sup>29</sup>Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Partners in Scandal: Wesleyan and Pentecostal Scholarship," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34:1 (Spring 1999): 10. The reflection of Johns is relevant to a number of issues raised in my argument.

<sup>30</sup>The reification of opposition among modern deontology and teleology neglects the richness of more historically grounded perspectives. For instance, the writing of John Paul II is instructive. In *Veritatis Splendor*, a nuanced distinction is made between an appropriate "teleology" or divinely directed end in life and ethical "teleologism." See John Wilkins, ed., *Considering Veritatis Splendor* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 142-146.

perfection do not mix readily.”<sup>31</sup> On one level, this is certainly true, but some time ago W. E. Sangster reminded us that Wesley’s appreciation for volition, particularly when dissecting the problem of sin, paralleled aspects of Kant’s own embryonic moral theory.<sup>32</sup> This dated observation does not make Wesley a proleptic Kantian deontologist, but it does hint at why American holiness advocates in the subsequent century popularized themes reminiscent of the Königsberg philosopher.

Surely holiness leaders deviated from Wesley at critical points.<sup>33</sup> But this need not be interpreted as an embarrassing lack of Wesleyan authenticity. As unfashionable as it may sound, perhaps we ought to tarry for a moment among the deontological temper of nineteenth-century holiness before racing into postcritical or postliberal responses. The holiness ethic of old, though fraught with stifling legalism at times and perhaps even a “decisionistic” moral psychology, harbors a priceless resource for facing the future.<sup>34</sup>

### **The New Consequentialism and the Affirmation of Person**

My plea for a re-evaluation of the holiness ethic invites serious scrutiny, and I will attempt to anticipate both concerns and possibilities surrounding my proposal.

1. Of course, any sympathetic willingness to revisit the ethical archetypes of nineteenth-century holiness may be poorly timed, quaint, or at best

---

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 35. See Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 81.

<sup>32</sup>W. E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943), 115.

<sup>33</sup>Douglas Strong’s presidential address before the Wesleyan Theological Society was a refreshingly unashamed acknowledgment of this dynamic. In fact, the kind of ethic that I am proposing shares several emphases with the language of “sanctified eccentricity.” Douglas M. Strong, “Sanctified Eccentricity: The Continuing Relevance of the Nineteenth Century Holiness Paradigm,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:1 (Spring 2000): 9-21.

<sup>34</sup>I realize that my suggestion may need to own the liabilities of decisionism, though one might argue that current stereotypes of nineteenth-century holiness must themselves undergo critique. See Randy L. Maddox, “Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 50:2/51:1 (Fall 1995/Spring 1996): 160, and Randy L. Maddox, “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (Fall 1998): 46-47.

idiosyncratic. Has not the reappropriation of character-based/virtue ethics demonstrated that the stale deontological versus teleological confrontation is little more than a superannuated paradigm of Enlightenment moral philosophy? Those of us who care deeply for the recovery of Wesley might be especially prone to reach this conclusion. After all, the “postliberal critique” of nineteenth-century Methodism (and its concomitant “rediscovery” of Wesley) shares many of the same presuppositions expressed by narrative theologians and others interested in moving beyond mutually exclusive modern categories.<sup>35</sup> I think especially of the incisive treatment offered in recent years by Henry Spaulding that addresses this very issue, and I agree wholeheartedly that something unlike either modern “deontology” or “teleology” best captures our hope for a future witness.<sup>36</sup>

But serious personal reflection has forced me to reconsider my own maligning of the nineteenth century on the way to some postcritical formulation. In particular, I have watched the past decade of post-Cold War culture and am persuaded that we have not entered the anticipated era in which one can automatically move beyond modern categories. Rather, we stand within an epoch that celebrates the acceleration and institutionalizing of extremely consequentialist thinking. This in itself need not drive our contemporary response as one of transmuted deontology, but it does raise complicating challenges for postliberal analysis. In the 1980s, Thomas Ogletree wrote:

Consequentialism is a mode of inquiry and reflection which can come into its own only when the people of a society have considerable confidence in their ability to predict and shape the future course of world events. Insofar as it has gained a position of dominance in nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought, it is because of its special congruence with high-technology civilization.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>This “postliberal critique” is now a reigning interpretive lens. One brief synopsis of this perspective is presented in Douglas M. Strong, “Sanctified Eccentricity: The Continuing Relevance of the Nineteenth Century Holiness Paradigm,” 13-14.

<sup>36</sup>Henry W. Spaulding II, “Good Conscience or Good Confidence: A Post-modern Re-thinking of Ethical Reflection in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:1 (Spring 2000): 41-66.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 204.

This linkage between technology and consequentialism is even stronger today. The almost seamless relationship between our information age and the dominance of global capitalism has only served to accentuate the dangers of unexamined consequentialism. If there were some implicit bond between early nineteenth-century teleological thought and the “spirit of capitalism,” the alliance today is palpable. Instrumental value has become the rule. To the extent that technology may be a complex means for serving intrinsically worthy ends, it promises to be of great assistance. But the infatuation with such means as ends in themselves can lead to the eventual inversion of values, where humanity itself becomes the ultimate instrument.<sup>38</sup>

At this juncture the issue of power emerges. It is not my intent to offer some new and inevitably simplistic definition of power.<sup>39</sup> But without pausing to develop a fully adequate notion, I risk the suggestion that any analysis of power must grapple with the dynamic of human agency that employs means to reach pre-established ends. To this extent, consequentialist moral theories and their accompanying reliance on raw “technique” represent the greatest philosophical rationale for the abuse of power.<sup>40</sup> When combined with the excesses of a global economic system, the potential for injustice is almost unlimited.

The commodification of people, whether through lucrative manipulation of the human genome or exploitative labor practices in the “new” economy, confirms the unwillingness of modern assumptions to step aside. In days of yore, one might emphasize the ways in which Marxist collectivism placed human dignity in the service of the next five-year plan. But developments of the last decade have introduced unprecedented threats to the human person through an uncritical embrace of the profit motive. Again, this resurgent “teleologizing” of humanity need not be met by some nostalgic reiteration of holiness deontology. But the presumed postcritical

---

<sup>38</sup>This insidious tendency was probed years ago in such writings as Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1934), 31-64.

<sup>39</sup>The dilemma of definition is addressed forthrightly in Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>40</sup>The specific judgment is entirely my own, but some support for offering this assessment can be found in the work of several. See especially Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964) and Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).



march beyond modern categories may need to halt, reassess, and remap a way forward.

2. One immediate and understandable challenge to my proposal may relate to the way in which deontological thinking has been expressed throughout the holiness heritage. Wesleyans of all varieties bring some historical connection with “general rules” of behavior. Most rule schemes include both negative and positive duties, but in practice, much of holiness thought has featured the negative, as witnessed by sweeping prohibitions around various kinds of entertainment, dress, and other forms of “worldliness.” This tendency is consistent with the predominantly negative drift of nineteenth-century deontological ethics, and it is here where Dunning’s analysis commends itself. Yet might it be possible to transvalue the negative emphasis of holiness deontology for the contemporary world?

This essay opened with a typological consideration of, among other things, the historic clash between Catholic cultural sensitivities and the teleological thrust of New England Protestantism. Perhaps at this point holiness folk have much to gain from engaging Catholicism’s own struggle with post-Cold War moral issues. Here one must begin with the philosophical reflection of John Paul II. His admittedly anti-consequentialist thinking expresses periodic flashes of positive accent:

If Kant so strongly emphasized that the person cannot be treated as an object of pleasure, he did so in order to oppose Anglo-Saxon utilitarianism, and from this point of view, he achieved his goal. Nevertheless, Kant did not fully interpret the commandment of love. In fact, the commandment of love is not limited to excluding all behavior that reduces the person to a mere object of pleasure. It requires more; it requires the *affirmation of the person as a person*.<sup>41</sup>

One may be inclined to file these musings under some anticipated extension of modern deontic commitments. Yet further consideration opens the possibility that something more profound is afoot. Even Stanley Hauerwas (no friend of lingering Enlightenment categories) observes that the 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, though disputed at a number of points and a

---

<sup>41</sup>John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 201. This statement is an accessible response that is consistent with a life of more detailed philosophical explication. See especially Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willets (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981), 40-44.

lightning rod for debate, “avoids a deontological construal” of critical matters.<sup>42</sup> It remains to be seen if a pontificate that many caricature as reactionary may, in the long run, be credited with initiating a philosophical shift that invites greater affirmation of all people.

One thing is clear. Several contemporary Catholic thinkers are already pursuing the trajectory of this redirection toward the affirmative. Patricia Lamoureux’s recent “reconceptualization” of rights language represents such an exploration.<sup>43</sup> She contends that modern human rights terminology suffers from an inability to provide the type of contextual environment that invites, accepts, and affirms all people. Rights theory has been more adept at prohibiting behavior that may violate human dignity than it has at offering the sort of embrace that promotes human dignity. Lamoureux links the necessary shift toward affirmation with the church’s historic commitment to receive immigrants. The hospitality for and solidarity with the alien marks an intentional transformation from an ethic that is circumscribed by the prohibition of human rights violations and to an ethic that actively fosters human value. At root is the invitation to an attitudinal conversion that conceives of the “other” as a gift and not as a threat. Her rich re-traditioning of this theological witness challenges us to hear in the move toward some postcritical affirmation a call to welcome all people.<sup>44</sup> This perspective pervades the recent statement by the United States Catholic Conference:

---

<sup>42</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, “*Veritatis Splendor*,” *Commonweal*, 22 October 1993, 17.

<sup>43</sup>Patricia A. Lamoureux, “Immigration Reconsidered in the Context of an Ethic of Solidarity,” in *Made In God’s Image: The Catholic Vision of Human Dignity*, ed. Regis Duffy, O.F.M. & Angelus Gambatese, O.F.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 105-135. Lamoureux borrows the phrase “reconceptualization of rights” from Arthur J. Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities: The Moral Bonds of Community* (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994). She is also indebted to Mary Ann Glendon. See Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1991). For ways in which the Catholic moral tradition has identified rights language as stronger in denunciation than in contextual affirmation, see John Langan, S.J., “Human Rights in Roman Catholicism,” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 5.*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), 122.

<sup>44</sup>Patricia A. Lamoureux, “Immigration Reconsidered in the Context of an Ethic of Solidarity,” 129. Many of these same themes are examined and given a thoughtfully practical treatment in Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

. . .we are not free to abandon unborn children because they are seen as unwanted or inconvenient; to turn our backs on immigrants because they lack the proper documents; to turn away from poor women and children because they lack economic or political power.<sup>45</sup>

It is not enough to parse the various equations regarding intrinsically evil action and the violation of human dignity. The affirmation of God's people is at stake.

We therefore return to the biblical narrative of our brother Moses and his fluid self-understanding. It is true that his confrontation with Egyptian power makes him an "alien residing in a foreign land." But the countercultural identity that Moses confesses is prefaced by the hospitality he receives in the land of Midian. Affirmation and welcome precede the ownership of alien status. In this respect, those who argue that the church's witness is predicated on God's initiatory acceptance find support in the story of Moses. An ethic that challenges us to welcome all arises from a narrative in which God's embrace is primary. In short, it is an ethic of response, and our witness of affirmation is formed through the kinds of doxological practices that have been identified as central to the postcritical experience.<sup>46</sup>

For the holiness tradition, this transformation invites us to move from an obsession with the law that is characteristic of much modern deontology and move toward the meaning of grace implied in an unconditional affirmation of all persons. This would entail becoming less concerned with external rules, but it would not entail assimilation into the dominant consequentialism of American culture. A moral philosophy of holiness grounded in the affirmation of the person as a person would prove every bit as discrete as any nineteenth-century list of behavioral prohibitions. But it would not find itself arrested in the perpetual quest for ecclesiastical

<sup>45</sup>United States Catholic Conference, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1999), 11.

<sup>46</sup>Here I appreciate the various attempts of postliberal theologians to ground any ethic in the habituated practices of love that emanate from our experience of God. While not specifically linked to postliberal or postcritical themes, Douglas Strong's reference to resources within nineteenth-century holiness practice captures this dynamic of experience and affirmation well: "Because we have been accepted by God, Holiness people declared, then we are called to accept others. The converts at the campmeetings welcomed the strangers in their midst—those left aside by the larger society." Douglas M. Strong, "Sanctified Eccentricity: The Continuing Relevance of the Nineteenth Century Holiness Paradigm," 20.

identity definition that characterizes so many narrative/postliberal theologies. The question is whether or not we are up to exercising this kind of prophetic welcome. The proposition poses a challenge to the bourgeois fascination with success offered by many church growth strategists, long-range planners, and total quality managers.

The ethic of affirmation, though active and responsorial in scope, would require a kind of *kenosis* or self-emptying amidst the reigning culture of teleological achievement. But it would not be a *kenosis* of nihilistic self-destruction or self-congratulatory withdrawal from the world. Rather, it would be a *kenosis* of intentional axiological affirmation, an offering, if you will, of the movement up to God on behalf of the forgotten, the downsized, and the marginalized—the embarrassing, the unimpressive, and the unwanted—in short, the people for whom Jesus died. The distinction between the *kenosis* of Christ and that of his followers lies in God’s supreme gift of self in order to become other than self. As in the life of Moses, a holiness *kenosis* would embrace the uncomfortable memory that calls us back to our proper selves in response to God’s welcome of us. The way of love can be measured neither in terms of disengagement nor in terms of calculated sociocultural advancement. The ultimate criterion of value is determined in response to the one who became scandal for our reclamation and who rose as the promise of true life.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Leslie Kaufman, *“Logical” Luther Lee and the Methodist War Against Slavery*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8108-3710-2.

Reviewed by William C. Kostlevy, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Why another biography of a dead white male abolitionist? After all, it has been twenty years since Lawrence J. Friedman announced in the *Historian* (February 1981) that the proverbial abolitionist historical well might be dry. Fortunately, few historians including Friedman himself have heeded this ill-conceived advice. In fact, given the centrality of slavery, race, the Civil War, and the continued debates about the meaning of freedom, it is hard to imagine that too many biographies could be written about those who sought to force North American society to bridge the gap between American political ideals and an economic system that turned human beings into property.

Although virtually unknown outside holiness circles, Luther Lee is a figure of no small stature in American history. A pioneer Methodist preacher and apologist, Lee was an important Methodist abolitionist and one of the central figures in the founding of the Liberty Party and the Wesleyan Methodist Church. He was president of the first general conference of the Wesleyan Methodists and editor of the *True Wesleyan* (1844-1852). Following the publication of the new movement’s standard handbook of doctrine, *Elements of Theology* (1856) which went through at least twelve editions in the nineteenth century, Lee served on the faculties of Leoni and Adrian (MI) College. As a result, a scholarly biography of Lee has been long overdue.

This revision of Paul Kaufman's outstanding Ph.D. dissertation at Kent State University is an important edition to the vast contemporary literature on abolitionism. Although possessing all the strengths of a superior dissertation—such as thorough research, a mastery of the primary and secondary source material, and exhibiting an understanding of the key historiographical debates, this work contains few of the common drawbacks for that literary genre. It is well written, with just enough background material to hold the reader's interest while avoiding the tedious detail that mares so many dissertations. Although this reviewer would have liked a fuller discussion of Lee's theology and its relation to his abolitionist thought, the author's focus on Lee and Methodist abolitionism certainly focuses on Lee's most memorable historical role.

Following in the tradition of Russell B. Nye, Martin Duberman, Donald Mathews, Betty Fladeland, Donald W. Dayton, and even the unreconstructed Marxist Herbert Aptheker, Kaufman sees Lee as a broad-minded idealist deeply rooted in evangelical piety. Among the notable contributions of this book to contemporary scholarship on abolitionism is its demonstration that some political abolitionists, including Lee, were as committed to women's rights and an active role for women in the abolitionist movement as any follower of William Lloyd Garrison. Secondly, Kaufman provides important collaboration to Paul Goodman's contention, in his justly praised *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (1998), that many abolitionists were active in the early labor movement. Thirdly, Kaufman provides support for the growing scholarly consensus that evangelical abolitionists were radical social egalitarians.

In fairness, these facts are hardly news to those of us who have been initiated into the mysteries of holiness thought by Timothy L. Smith and Donald W. Dayton. But Kaufman's book, especially when read in light of the recent publications by Goodman and Douglas M. Strong's *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionists and the Religious Tensions of Democracy* (1999), helps make a compelling case for the social radicalism of significant sectors of the evangelical abolitionist community. This is an important work that deserves to be in the libraries of all those interested in abolitionism and nineteenth-century evangelicalism.

C. Leonard Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God's Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books), 2001. 199 pp. ISBN: 0-9700836-4-5.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana.

This book is a very clear and relevant case study of the shaping impact of “secular” philosophies on Christian theology. With particular reference to the Churches of Christ (“Restoration”) tradition, Leonard Allen and Danny Swick recall a crucial crossroads faced by this movement in the 1850s, a crossroads critical both then and now. The unfortunate decision then, according to these authors, was to favor a “modernist” philosophy that, while employed to support renewed biblical faithfulness, led to an essentially Spiritless Christianity. In varying degrees, much of establishment evangelicalism in the early twenty-first century suffers from a similar impoverishment, thus the significance of this book for more than the Churches of Christ.

The authors urge the recovery of a biblical spirituality rooted in the triune nature of God. They are looking for the revitalization of their own tradition (Churches of Christ). It lies in a better balance that recognizes the biblical view of God's relational nature. With such balance people may be newly encouraged to actually participate in God's life by divine grace. This book builds on Leonard Allen's 1990 *The Cruciform Church* and is motivated by the observation that the Churches of Christ movement is approaching the two-century mark of its tradition in the midst of a momentous cultural and worldview shift. The shift is said to be away from antiquated and unbiblical “modernist” commitments. The authors rehearse the road not taken in 1857-60 and suggest that a similar crossroads—and a fresh opportunity—is being faced in 2001. Such a thesis is in line with the history of the Churches of Christ in America now recounted skillfully by Richard T. Hughes (*Reviving the Ancient Faith*, Eerdmans, 1996). Hughes reports that in the late twentieth century a younger generation of this tradition announced to their elders that the tradition was being supported by “a brittle restorationist pillar poured from a rationalist mold” (385). They were not well heard for the most part. Allen and Swick are freshly sounding the warning.

Back in 1857 Robert Richardson, then associate editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, had said wisely: “It is a cardinal feature of this religious

reformation [the Stone-Campbell “restoration” movement] to direct the attention of men to words, even to the precious words of Holy Scripture. But it was never intended that these should be made a substitute for the things they reveal, or that mere grammar and logic should replace spiritual discernment and be permitted to establish themselves as a barrier between the soul and spiritual enjoyment.” Nonetheless, a path different from this was chosen by the tradition’s mainstream. It was to be a “Lockean heritage” path with its “distorted or neglected or hobbled doctrine of the Trinity” (56). This doctrine, says Allen and Swick, actually intends “not the passionless deity of Aristotle or the remote god of Enlightenment theism, but a God who is dynamic, demanding, personal and present” (56). Richardson’s nineteenth-century fear was that later generations would reap the spiritual leanness of the Lockean vision of Christianity. This present book concludes that his fear has largely come true. A reverence for Scripture has been burdened by the philosophy of modernity. If a quest for intimacy is key for the postmodern world, then the pressing question for the Stone-Campbell restorationist tradition is whether it has the resources to create and sustain meaningful intimacy for believers in our time.

The book *Participating in God’s Life* answers this pressing question in the affirmative and outlines vital doctrinal features of the alternative way now urgently proposed. The call is for an arid rationality to be replaced by a warm relationality that features the living God who longs for us hungry and hurting humans to participate in the Divine life. The Trinity doctrine claims both that God *forms* relationships and *is* a relationship. We believers should see ourselves “not so much as foot soldiers following Divine orders but as active partakers of the Divine Nature” (166). The spiritual life of Christians is said to be a life “indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God” (174). The bottom line is this: the Churches of Christ—and much of evangelicalism—faces the considerable challenge of developing a Trinitarian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, somewhat in line with that of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. At its heart, says Allen and Swick, is the “perfect love” shared by Father, Son, and Spirit (186). Readers of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* should applaud this work and pray for the success of its call to reform.



Paulo Ayres Mattos, *Mais de um Século de Educação Metodista: Tentativa de um sumário histórico-teológico e uma aventura educacional*, with an Apresentação by Almir de Souza Maia (Piracicaba, Brazil: Conselho Geral das Instituições Metodistas de Ensino [COGEIME], 2000. 96 pps. No ISBN.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

Methodist educational efforts have been undertaken with a certain frenetic desperation by the Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal churches, following the example and admonition of John Wesley. The results of this effort have shaped and been shaped by the churches to which they relate. The volume by Mattos describes and analyzes more than a century of Methodist educational efforts in Brazil. The work was commissioned by COGEIME and has a foreword by Almir de Souza Maia, president of COGEIME. It compliments the studies of Methodist education in Peru [Rosa del Carmen Bruno-Jafre, *Methodist Education in Peru: Social Gospel, Politics, and American Ideological and Economic Penetration, 1888-1930* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988)] and in the USA [Gerald O. McCulloh, *Ministerial Education in the American Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1980)] done earlier. The Mattos tome is an essential contribution to the understanding of education in a Methodist context.

The story of Methodist education began in Brazil quite early in the Methodist experience there. An early effort at Methodist evangelism in Brazil in 1836 saw a Sunday school organized in Rio de Janeiro. That initial incursion of Methodism into Brazil did not last long. The definitive arrival of Methodism in Brazil was later. Missionary J. J. Ransom organized the first Brazilian Methodist congregation (1878) and with it the first Sunday school. In 1879, the missionary Junius E. Newman established the first Methodist school, in Piracicaba. Since that time there have been a multitude of Sunday schools, numerous institutes and/or seminaries for the development of laity and clergy, and educational institutions that offered university-level education. This book develops the history of these efforts and tells much about the interaction of the Methodist Church with Brazilian society.

The first chapter (pps. 17-41), "Christian Education," sketches the development of the Sunday schools, the publication of periodicals for the

Sunday schools, and discusses the education for laity and the role of laity in the congregations. As in each chapter, careful attention is given to the juridical decisions of the church and the social forces that shaped the life of the church. It is noted that the Sunday schools have grown, but that advanced education for laity has faltered. The role of the laity has been diminished by the decisions of the General Conference, which reflect the tensions of the larger society. These ecclesial decisions of the last decades have given the result that “we live in an epoch of the accelerated restoration of clericalism”(p. 33). This, Mattos observes, has consequences. The neo-Pentecostal churches, with their insistence on the celebration of the gifts of individual believers, makes those churches quite attractive to Methodists who feel themselves “submerged” at every point by the clergy.

The next chapter (pps. 45-55) is devoted to education for the formation of clergy. Here Mattos narrates the complex evolution of theological education in Brazilian Methodism. The story begins with the establishment of a seminary at the first Annual Conference of the Brazilian Methodist Church (nine students) in 1896, and continues to the national plan adopted in 1987 that called for “unity, decentralization and integration” (p. 53), whereby students begin their training in regional centers before moving to the national-level institute in Sao Paolo. Here it is noted that an entire generation of students and faculty were lost to the church because of the social conflict in the larger society and the responses of the church to those problems.

The third chapter (pps. 59-81) discusses “secular education” for Methodists. As in the USA, the Methodists have found it advantageous to offer their youth an education that will allow them to function advantageously in the larger society. The story began quite early in Brazil (1885) with the establishment of the (Methodist) Collégio Americano in Porto Alegre. The complex evolution since that time is described with reference to the documents.

The final chapter offers proposals for the future. It is insisted that any successful program of education in this small denomination involves the development of a consensus. Indeed, throughout the book three issues are crucial. The first is the relationships of the church with the Brazilian government and culture. More could be said of history of both relationships, but there are many suggestive comments to guide future scholars and church persons. The second issue is the evolving theological framework of the Methodist church, and especially the evolution of the concept “Kingdom of God.” At each shift in the conceptual framework there has

been significant adjustment, and the educational paradigms have likewise shifted. The third issue has to do with competition with other denominations or religious traditions. It is clear, for example, that the increasing disenfranchisement of the laity and of the students declared leftist in the sixties and seventies led them to find homes in other intellectual and religious traditions.

This volume is a magisterial piece of research and writing. It is insightful, carefully documented, and passionate in its historical analysis and designs for a future. Brazil is not the only nation in which Methodists are facing such issues and pressures. This volume can be a major resource for Methodists around the world as they struggle for a Methodist theory and praxis of education.

Bryan P. Stone. *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000. ix + 197 pp. ISBN 0-89870-790-0

Review by Thomas Jay Oord, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, MA

Most of us have done it. We have made our way home from a theater or sat in front of our televisions and thought, "That film illustrates well what I think about X Christian belief." Or we've thought, "That film says what I want to say about doctrine X of my faith." Or maybe even, "I must begin to think differently about religious issue X having seen that movie." But what if we were to put together a whole series of movies whose themes exemplify or challenge our deepest Christian beliefs? What if we were to bring an extensive list of central Christian convictions into dialogue with some of the best the cinema has to offer? Bryan P. Stone does this and more in *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema*. What makes Stone's work particularly fascinating is the format he chooses: he selects a relevant movie to probe the meanings of each line from the Apostle's Creed.

"I believe," begins the creed. Stone chooses the modern science fiction movie *Contact* to discuss the "loyalties, allegiances, and values" involved in exercising faith. "*Contact* boldly places the questions of religious faith and its relationship to science at its front and center," argues Stone (15). The answer the film gives to these questions will not satisfy many believers. But this does not undermine the movie's importance, for "to say 'I believe' is costly and downright revolutionary in our world," contends the author (23).

The first object of Christian belief is "God, the Father almighty." Stone chooses Carl Reiner's 1977 classic, *Oh, God!*, to explore this tenet. Reiner's version of God, admits Stone, "is a downsized deity who avoids doing for humans what they can do for themselves" (27). While obviously inadequate to describe all that theists want to claim about divinity, *Oh, God!* Provides interesting fodder for discussions regarding the limitations, whether self-imposed or necessary, of divine presence, knowledge, and power. The Apostle's Creed also describes the almighty God as "Creator of heaven and earth." *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a science fiction classic from Stanley Kubrick, is chosen to address this phrase. "At the heart of *2001*," explains Stone, "are the twin questions of an ultimate creative intelligence in the universe and the nature and destiny of human existence within this larger design" (39).

Christians also believe, as the Creed puts it, in "Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." Stone picks *Jesus of Montreal* to instigate his wrestling

with some of the faith's christological issues. "The world portrayed in *Jesus of Montreal* is bathed in Jesus-images," writes Stone, "and yet the lordship of Jesus rarely penetrates that world and the lives of the people who live in it. Sadly, according to the film, the church may be the most unwilling to follow Jesus as Lord" (65). To discuss the creedal phrases "conceived by the Holy Spirit" and "born of the Virgin Mary," Stone turns to a trio of Jesus films: *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. This trio illustrates the ever-present tension between dual Christian affirmations: that Jesus (1) originated from God and, yet, (2) was born of a woman named Mary. Finally, *Romero* is selected to address both the belief that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate" and the complaint that the Apostle's Creed largely ignores Jesus' life and teachings. The archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, as portrayed in the movie, experienced the often harsh realities of faith's relationship with politics.

Jesus "was crucified, died, and was buried" and "He descended to the dead," continues the Creed. In one of the more fascinating chapters, Stone turns to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* for a representation of the suffering servant. Randall Patrick ("R. P.") McMurphy, played by Jack Nicholson, is a Christ-figure "who stands up against the forces of evil and domination and whose life and death serve as a means of redemption and liberation for his fellow patients," contends Stone (95). But, of course, McMurphy remains dead. By contrast, "on the third day [Jesus] rose again," declares the Apostle's Creed. Furthermore, "he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father." Stone refers to three cinematic vignettes—*Phenomenon*, *Powder*, and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*—in his analysis of these creedal lines. These films "portray the removal of its central character to another plane of existence," explains Stone, "and, consequently, that character's ongoing presence in and inspiration of those who are left behind" (112). The film *Flatliners* illustrates the judicial aspects of the tenet that Christ "will come again to judge the living and the dead." Central to this discussion of judgment is the responsibility inherent in creaturely actions. Or, as Keifer Sutherland's character in the film says, "Everything we do matters" (122).

The Apostle's Creed moves from Father and Son issues to several rather short statements each with colossal import. "May the Force be with you," movie-goers heard in 1977, and Stone cleverly uses this line and others from *Star Wars* to discuss the creedal statement, "I believe in the Holy

Spirit.” Obi-wan Kenobi describes the Force as “an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us. It penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together” (134). The parallels between pneumatology and descriptions of the Force are clearly evident.

The film *The Mission* is chosen by Stone for his discussion of issues entailed in “the holy catholic church.” “What makes *The Mission* both fascinating and frustrating as a film about the church,” says Stone, “is that it affords us a glimpse of so many different ‘faces’ of the church” (143). The Christian faith can never be entirely individualistic or private, however, as “the communion of saints” phrase from the Creed implies. Stone chooses *Babette’s Feast* to explore the sharing required of saintly communion. According to Stone, “the tradition of utilizing the imagery of a shared meal to communicate the mysterious experience of transformation and acceptance at the heart of the communion of saints is continued in [this] delightful film” (157).

The book closes with two chapters considering the implications of what it means to believe, as the Apostle’s Creed states, in “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” *Dead Man Walking* is about this forgiveness as redemption and unconditional love. The film is “a story about. . .how ordinary human beings can both experience forgiveness and be the agents of forgiveness” says Stone (168). Christian hope of resurrection and life everlasting is illustrated in an adaptation of Stephen King’s short story *The Shawshank Redemption*. Stone opts for this film partly because of its emphasis on this-world redemption. “Too often . . . we are so preoccupied with otherworldly or next-worldly matters that the affairs of this world recede into a distant background,” claims Stone. “But if Christian hope is finally escapist, then Jesus’ prayer for God’s kingdom to come ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ is a mistake, and all efforts to transform society into something more closely resembling God’s *shalom* are little more than the rearrangement of deck chairs on the Titanic” (183-184).

*Faith and Film* stimulates readers to deeper analysis of both subjects in the book’s title. The book makes a great discussion starter. To that end, Stone includes “Questions for Discussion” at the end of each chapter, and he lists several “Related Films” to each movie he chooses to address. Karen-Marie Yust’s endorsement of the book provides a fitting conclusion to this review: “Bryan Stone combines a pastor’s just and compassionate heart, a film critic’s keen eye, and a theologian’s discerning mind in this engaging dialogue between faith and film.”

---

Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century*, tr. O. C. Dean, Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Reviewed by Thomas E. Phillips, Colorado Christian University, Lakewood, CO.

Historians, biblical scholars, and theologians have frequently been known to express a particular interest in both the descriptive question of how Christianity has related to its social environment and the normative question of how it ought to relate. With this volume, biblical scholarship has finally produced a resource that makes the descriptive task of explaining earliest Christianity's social history more achievable for those without advanced training in sociology and the history of the Greco-Roman world. This volume, *The Jesus Movement*, provides a comprehensive introduction to first-century Christianity as a social phenomenon deeply rooted in the economic, social, political and religious structures of the Greco-Roman world.

This volume stands alone as both the most comprehensive and penetrating examination of the social history of first-century Christianity. It is divided into four parts, containing a general survey of social and economic issues in the Greco-Roman world, a narrower survey of social and economic issues among second temple Jews and the followers of Jesus, a survey of social and economic issues in the post-Easter communities of earliest urban Christianity, and a focused examination of the roles and the social status of women within early Christianity.

The first part of the book (pp. 5-95) provides an unsurpassed overview of the social and economic conditions within the Greco-Roman world. The Stegemanns are conversant with the ever-growing body of literature on the social and economic history of the Greco-Roman world, but they choose to write in conscious opposition to analyses which present that history in the form of an emerging capitalistic system. The Stegemanns insist that the ancient Mediterranean basin was an "advanced agrarian society" in which the ownership of land (and slaves to work the land) was the decisive factor in establishing social status and in which the production of agricultural goods formed the basis of the economy—while also seeing the emergence of skilled tradespersons as a rising influence. In regard to the social and economic structures of the Greco-Roman world, this volume interprets the same data as did volume one of Helmut Koester's

*Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: de Gruyter, 2000), but this volume provides a less capitalistic interpretation. Readers desiring a comprehensive survey of the data and a representative interpretation from each of the dominant trends within scholarship could do no better than to read Koester and Stegemanns in dialogue.

The second part of the book (pp. 97-247) examines the social, political, and economic status of Jesus and his closest followers in earliest Christianity. The authors discuss the two dominant models for understanding the social origins of the Jesus movement: the model of a millenarian (apocalyptic) movement and the model of a charismatic movement. The Stegemanns opt for the charismatic interpretation, arguing that Jesus' earliest followers understood themselves as a movement (sect) of the poor within Israel which was led by a single charismatic figure. Within this interpretive framework, the Stegemanns find little room for a messianic consciousness on Jesus' part and, consequently, regard all sacrificial and atonement language as post-Easter developments within the Jesus movement. Of course, many readers will doubt the validity of these findings in particular, but, in most regards, the Stegemanns' reconstructions are—in spite of the speculative nature forced on such reconstructions by the nature of their sources—generally plausible. In all cases, the authors consistently demonstrate a mastery of the relevant secondary sources. Their analyses of the Matthean and Johannine communities, which they regard as post-70 communities within Israel, are particularly perceptive and offer succinct assessments that could hardly hope to be surpassed within such a brief span (223-33).

The third part of the book (pp. 249-358) examines the social history of the Christ-confessing communities in the cities of the Greco-Roman world. Although the Stegemanns provide a comprehensive survey of the literature that finds the origins of these communities in the vocational, burial, and other voluntary associations so prevalent in the Greco-Roman world, they argue that the closest parallels to the urban Christian communities like those founded by Paul were the Greco-Roman institutions of the household and the political body. The Stegemanns, in keeping with the consensus of contemporary scholarship, argue that the churches of the first century were composed of persons from all but the highest levels of Greco-Roman society and that believers from the retainer class were particularly important to the spread of the Christian message. In spite of the fact that the Stegemanns interpret the Jesus movement's relationship to Judaism in



terms of a sect's relationship to its parent, they interpret post-Easter Jewish-Christian interaction as a conflict between two separate minority groups within a predominantly pagan environment, thus emphasizing the difference between the Jesus movement and the church.

The fourth part of the book (pp. 359-407) acknowledges the importance of gender in any social history and thus carefully examines the role and status of women in early Christianity. Although the Stegemanns find that early Christianity generally enhanced the status of women within the household, they argue that women's role in the church was influenced by their role in the political life of the Greco-Roman world. Therefore, women were allowed to participate in the community's worship because they were included in the household of faith (e.g., 1 Cor. 11), but women were generally forbidden from speaking about official functions of the church because they were excluded from the domain of politics (e.g., 1 Cor. 14). The Stegemanns' analysis of this important issue is fresh and insightful, if not always compelling.

Overall, this volume is a substantial contribution to a burgeoning area of inquiry. Both its synthesis of recent scholarship and its original analysis of the data will prove greatly beneficial to any interpreter of the biblical texts who wishes to engage in the descriptive, historical task of social history as a preliminary to the normative theological task of promoting social transformation. This book is a must for every theological library.

John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 140 pages, pbk.

Reviewed by Henry W. Spaulding II, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee.

Most observers of the contemporary theological scene recognize the significance of Radical Orthodoxy. Both the 1999 and 2000 programs of the American Academy of Religion featured the principals of this new movement. In fact, John Milbank, the formative personality in Radical Orthodoxy, was featured at the 2000 American Academy of Religion in both the Barth Society and the North American Paul Tillich Society. This fact alone testifies to the breadth of interest in this new movement. *Truth in Aquinas* is the most recent addition to the growing literature associated with Radical Orthodoxy. It joins Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* and *The Word Made Strange*, as well as Catherine Pickstock's *After Writing* as crucial for understanding the thrust of this movement. It is also part of a series published by Routledge, which will no doubt extend discussion of the defining themes of Radical Orthodoxy. *Truth in Aquinas* attempts to resituate truth for contemporary theology and philosophy by re-examining Thomas Aquinas. Milbank and Pickstock do this under the heading of four chapters that link truth to correspondence, vision, touch, and language.

The authors begin the book by looking at "four main attitudes toward truth in contemporary thought" (xi). These attitudes are doubt, confinement of truth to practice rather than theory, confinement of truth to theory rather than practice, and a fideistic affirmation of religious truth. Therefore, the book begins by calling attention to a crisis in truth and the intention of the authors to "undertake a new reading of Aquinas's understanding of truth" (xiii).

The first chapter, "Truth and Correspondence," enters into the debate that has raged since the early days of the twentieth century regarding the status of the correspondence theory of truth. Pickstock, the author of this chapter, examines such philosophers as Bruce Marshall, Alfred Tarski, and Donald Davidson in order to assess the current status of discussion on truth and correspondence. She suggests that a fuller understanding of Aquinas better addresses the problems noted by Marshall. She says, "Aquinas's fundamental theory of truth is as theological as it is philosophical, and is only a correspondence theory in a sense which depends entirely upon the meta-

physical notion of participation in the divine Being” (4). When truth is understood as participation it becomes primarily an ontological consideration. Such a conclusion challenges the dualism between metaphysics and epistemology, which turns out to be the culprit in the current crisis of truth. She argues, “because Truth and Being are convertible, one with another, there is a continuity between the way things are in the external material world and the way things are in our mind” (8). While it is not possible to examine the nuances in this review, Pickstock’s argument is compelling. She says, “all human knowing is to be seen as an artistic production, which again emphasizes that truth is regarded in ontological rather than epistemological terms since it is in this way construed as an event rather than a mirroring” (17). Therefore, the correspondence theory when viewed through the lens of Aquinas can be rehabilitated because “for Aquinas, to correspond in knowing is to be conformed to the infinite unknown . . .” (18).

The second chapter by John Milbank, “Truth and Vision,” challenges the almost standard treatment of Aquinas which posits a sharp distinction between reason and faith. He fully admits that many passages can be quoted from Aquinas suggesting just such a distinction, but he says “exegesis is easy; it is interpretation that is difficult” (20). Central of Milbank’s case is the understanding that “the natural powers of thought and the superadded powers given in grace and glory both operate through participation in the uncreated and intelligible light of divine intellect” (22). In an attempt to properly interpret Aquinas, Milbank shows that the most adequate understanding of Aquinas is theo-ontology and not onto-theology. Here Milbank uses the word intensity to suggest that metaphysics is dependent upon revelation and that theology is metaphysical in the best sense of the word. In fact, he suggests in other places that we need to evacuate all attempts to philosophize in some independent space. The importance of such an observation extends to philosophy and theology with equal intensity.

The third chapter jointly written by Milbank and Pickstock is entitled “Truth and Touch.” This is the most interesting chapter in the book because it faces the issue of sensation by a consideration of the Incarnation. The importance of the analysis here is to show how Radical Orthodoxy can face important philosophical issues by a re-assertion of classical Christian doctrine. The authors begin by observing that for Aquinas “the Incarnation is the sole ground for the restoration of our participation in the divine understanding” (60). They begin their consideration of the Incarnation by look-

ing at *convenientia*. Therefore, the pathway for talking about the Incarnation lies between the categories of necessity and the arbitrary.

Pickstock and Milbank observe, “the thematic of ‘convenience’ as applied to the divine economy of creation and redemption signals, in Aquinas, an aesthetic construal of participation. . .” (61). It is relatively easy to see how this move is important for their argument. First, it acknowledges that God was not compelled to redeem the way he did, but the way he did redeem reflects both the freedom and beauty of God’s desire to redeem. Second, truth is conveniently displayed in Christ as convenience. Third, “[t]hrough the Incarnation, the divine *convenientia* is only redisplayed, and the hierarchial, ascending *convenientia* only restored, because the two are made absolutely to coincide” (63). This move in the most radical and absolute sense brings about a new ontological state by a fusion of the finite with the infinite. It is not difficult to see the importance of this for coming to understand touch. This means that “Christ embodied the true theology: that which the *summa*, intensifying itself, must *build up to*, not abstract away from” (65). This calls for a new emphasis upon the materiality of theology, in other words, “only the Truth incarnate founds faith” (65). The authors go on in this chapter to consider some of the implications of this joining of sensory intuition and divine intuition. The Incarnation “tends to the proliferation of sacred sites as uncontrollable by any institutional force” (69). Here it is evident that the authors are contending for ontological categories instead of epistemological ones. Pickstock and Milbank conclude that for Aquinas all sensation is touch. This means that even spiritual sensibilities are immediate and even physical. It is precisely in this way that the Incarnation as touch renders the truth. Pickstock and Milbank summarize all of this near the end of the chapter: “And since God is now revealed as touch, the new ontological exaltation of the sensory over the intellectual is not a mere pedagogic means, but an appropriate new disclosure of the ultimately real” (87).

The final chapter written by Pickstock is entitled “Truth and Language.” She begins by offering a critique of Derrida’s theory of absence. Her basic problem is that Derrida’s attempt to erase the Cartesian subject is a fiction. This raises the problem of the dichotomy of presence and absence. In order to face this she begins to talk about the Eucharist, which “implies a positive but not fetishizable *arrival*, in which signs essentially participate, but which they cannot exhaust. . .” (92). This grants a much more positive use of signs than Derrida’s account of language would

allow. This appears to be a brilliant move for those who would like to overcome the nihilism inherent in Derrida's theory. Contrary to Derrida's implication, "the Eucharist situates us more inside language than ever" (97). The Eucharist not only carries absence it delivers presence. Therefore, we can see the way in which language is not that which distances us from participation; rather it is constitutive of that participation.

*Truth in Aquinas* is complex, yet compelling in its attempt to offer a theological situation for life. Those within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition will find the reading of this book worth the effort. The emphasis on touch might offer a fruitful path for thinking about holiness. The separation of spirituality and materiality has posed a deep and enduring threat to thinking about holiness as embodied. It has led on one side to extravagant claims about holiness, which have in turn led to what Mildred Bangs Wynkoop called a credibility gap. Yet, on the other side, it has led to a minimalist vision of holiness, which is scarcely distinct from the reformed vision of the Christian life. This dilemma threatens the intellectual credibility of heart holiness. Perhaps, the work presented here by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock will point some toward a resolution of the problem. This is just one example of the significance of *Truth in Aquinas*. There is much more contained within its pages for thoughtful consideration.

James L. Garlow, *How God Saved Civilization: The Epic Story of God Leading His People, the Church*. Ventura, Ca.: Regal Books, 2000.

Reviewed by Graham Walker, Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.

Ignorance of history is a dangerous thing. One who is ignorant of the past, they say, is condemned to repeat its mistakes. I wonder how upcoming generations of Americans can be good citizens when surveys show that many students at prestigious universities know little or nothing about pivotal events in American history like the ratification of the Constitution or the Civil War. It is even more worrisome for Christians to be ignorant of history. After all, Christianity is not a system of abstract ideas but a historical religion that depends entirely on certain historical facts being true—such as the giving of the Law to Moses and whether Jesus really rose again (1 Cor. 15:14-15). To be mature and secure, we also need to know what God has done since biblical times. As James Garlow argues in *How God Saved Civilization*, God didn't withdraw from history after Christ's resurrection, but established the church as the chosen vehicle for proclaiming the gospel and transmitting grace to all humans. God didn't just establish the church, but has guided the church for the last two thousand years and repeatedly corrected its errors. These errors, and how the Lord corrected them, form the most interesting and probably the most important aspect of Garlow's book.

The church today, very much including its Evangelical wing, badly needs to remember what Garlow recounts: how God kept the church from falling into Arianism (the denial of Jesus' full divinity), into Pelagianism (the denial of man's sinfulness), or into Gnosticism (the denial of the goodness of the human body and the physical world). We need to know how the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was forged and then transmitted by the early martyrs and by Ambrose, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. We need to know how the Bishops of Rome became the Popes, how they fell into errors, and how Wycliffe, Huss, and Luther attempted to set things straight. And we need to know how the denominations and movements that now comprise American Evangelicalism derived from early branches of Christendom and so how they are related to one another. Garlow's account is especially noteworthy in that, unlike other chroniclers of Evangelicalism, he does not omit from his account the non-Calvinist Evangelicalism of John Wesley's various descendants. Showing us our ancestry in Christ,

Garlow helps us to be grateful and humble. He also reminds us of the resources we have that can keep our doctrine and practice pure. Christian history is essential for Christian truth; Garlow makes it as accessible as it is essential. Thus, the greatest merit of his book is that it is written for ordinary readers rather than scholars.

Does Garlow's book have any faults? Not very many. Sticklers for detail may find one or two names and dates mis-matched. Others will notice that, while he gives a clear narrative of how God saved the church (from internal and external threats), Garlow does not give an equally explicit account of how this had the effect of saving civilization at large, leaving the promise of the book's title somewhat unfulfilled. There are a few places where Garlow's interpretation seems a bit off. For instance, Garlow praises the 13th-century mystic Meister Eckhart as a "spectacular model" of disciple-making (p. 111). Eckhart "captured the hearts of many" by teaching that we can become "absorbed" or "lost in God." Garlow notes with apparent regret that the Catholic Church condemned Eckhart's wording on this point. But there is good reason to condemn Eckhart's formulation. Eckhart spoke of union with God as if it were fusion with God. The Bible resists any pantheistic idea characteristic of eastern religions and of today's "New" thought. Another potentially misleading interpretation occurs when he praises Hannah Whitall Smith for "pointing out that God is gender free, even though we use masculine pronouns such as 'He' or 'Him'" (p. 253). By the Bible's account, human fatherhood derives from God's Fatherhood, not the other way around (Eph. 3:15). Our heavenly father existed as God the Father, the Father of God the Son, from all eternity—long before God made human fathers to reflect (imperfectly at best) true fatherhood, which is God's alone (Mt. 23:9).

But I love Garlow's book because these are small flaws compared to the rich sweep of its history. Actually, these minor faults probably result from going just a bit too far with Garlow's chief virtue, his determination to find something to praise in every sincere Christian leader and every Christian movement. As he says, "I look for the positive influences brought by each movement, while accepting their respective weaknesses. . . . [God] doesn't give up on us as quickly as we are inclined to give up on each other; He doesn't seem to find as much fault with us as we find with each other. . . . It's as though He smiles with a knowing nod and says, 'I am going to work with them anyway, in spite of themselves.' And this is precisely what He does" (p. 237). This charitable attitude is especially evident

admirable when Garlow discusses those with whom he has clear differences. His accounts of Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and “third wave,” for example, help us recognize the valid work of God even when Garlow does not endorse all their practices or doctrines. In one of the more stirring parts of his book, Garlow even calls for a “grand remarriage” of the Pentecostal and Holiness movements (p. 353). If only the rest of us could manage to remain so charitable while knowing so much about the faults of the church since the first century! Maybe if we let Garlow teach us—using his book in Sunday School classes and study groups, for instance—we would absorb his charity along with his treasure-trove of knowledge.





# First Steps To Ministry

*Jesus said, "Many are called, few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). In many churches and denominations "few are called and even fewer choose" is a more accurate description of the reality of the future of ministry.*



*Designed as a text for undergraduates students thinking about ministry, this text is a helpful tool also for those in ministry as a checkpoint in God's continuing call on their lives.*

**TITLE:** *First Steps to Ministry, A Primer on a Life in Christian Ministry*

**AUTHOR:** David Markle,  
general editor

**STOCK #** D7412  
**ISBN #** 0-87162-899-6  
**UPC #** 730817-41197-5  
**Pages:** 248

**RETAIL PRICE:** \$15.95

Request review copies on  
letterhead from:  
Donna Meiser  
Church of God Ministries  
PO Box 2420  
Anderson, IN 46018-2420

**M**inistry, never an easy task, is central to congregational life and key to achieving God's plan. *First Steps* is a checkpoint: what ministry does God call me to—and, for those who are already in ministry, to what does God continue to call me?

Written by pastors, church administrators, and faculty, *First Steps* helps us understand the importance of balancing the *tasks* with the *relationships* of ministry. While each author focuses on a particular aspect of ministry, recurring central themes emerge: prayer; spiritual disciplines; continuing study and reflection; the discipline of commitment; and congruence—strong and visible connection between walk and talk.

## THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK

- I. Being**—foundations of who we are
- II. Becoming**—disciplining ourselves for fruitful living
- III. Doing**—discovering what we will do
- IV. Overcoming**—Skills for winning the war

"This book abounds in wisdom, rich with information and inspired guidance. For those taking first steps to ministry, this primer sets forth the principles underlying servant ministry in the spirit of Christ. It also offers a refreshing read for those whose service years have been many, but whose heart and feet still march in glad service to the heat of the heavenly Drum."

JAMES EARL MASSEY  
Dean Emeritus, and Distinguished  
Professor-at-Large,  
Anderson University School of Theology



## *"What does this scripture mean?"*

Is this a question you sometimes ask when studying the Bible, preparing a Sunday school lesson, or even reading a sermon? If so, take a look at the Wesleyan Bible Commentary Series!

In a time when few people read or study the Bible, it can be a tremendous challenge to explain Scripture in a way that makes it easy to understand and apply to life. That's why we created the Wesleyan Bible Commentaries.

This outstanding reference collection is an excellent tool for personal study and will be an asset to any church library. Each commentary is substantive in content and is written and formatted in a "friendly" manner. This series will help in discipling lay leaders and Bible teachers by increasing their understanding of the Word.

### Wesleyan Bible Commentaries

- Answer the basic questions of faith
- Illustrate the broad themes of the Bible
- Deepen one's understanding of God
- Discover the original meaning of a Scripture passage and its historical context
- Provide a link between Biblical times and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

You can trust Wesleyan Bible Commentaries to present the Wesleyan theological perspective in an easy-to-follow format.

If you have a hunger to learn and teach all you can about God's Word, this resource will help to achieve your goal.

Get started today!

**Wesleyan Bible Commentary Set of 10**

Save over \$49.™ ~~\$214.95~~ **\$163.95**

### Individual Commentaries

BR0175	Corinthians	BR0176	Hebrews	<b>\$24.99</b>
BR0661	Galatians	BR0608	Ephesians	
BR0607	Proverbs	BR0605	1 & 2 Thessalonians	
BR0172	John	BR0177	Mt. James	
BR0664	Psalm	BR0609	James	

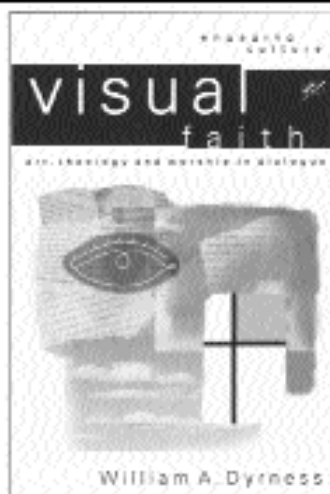


Call 1-800-4 WESLEY • (1-800-493-7639)

Fax: 1-800-788-3535 • E-mail: [wph@wesleyan.org](mailto:wph@wesleyan.org)

Online: [www.wesleyan.org/wph](http://www.wesleyan.org/wph)

# ENGAGING CULTURE



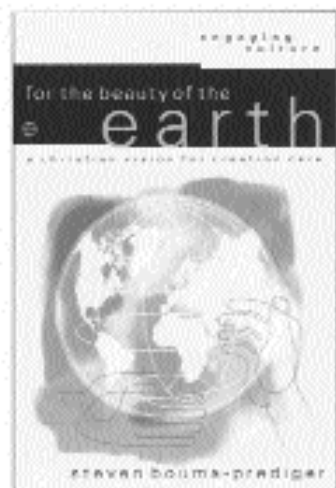
0-8010-2297-5 • 192 pp. • \$21.99p

"Both theological and practical, this wide-ranging study will be of special interest to all who want to get beyond the sterile prejudices that have so often marred the relationship between visual art and Protestantism."

—Jeremy Kuylic, *Cambridge University and University of St. Andrews*

"This is an important book. Steven Bouma-Prediger combines theological depth with ecological savvy to issue a profound call to environmental discipleship. He makes his case in a way that both informs and inspires!"

—Richard J. Mouw, president,  
Fuller Theological Seminary



0-8010-2298-3 • 240 pp. • \$21.99p

ALSO AVAILABLE IN THE ENGAGING CULTURE SERIES:

*Real Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*

*Robert K. Johnston*

0-8010-2241-X • 240 pp. • \$16.99p

## Baker Academic

Subscribe to Baker Academic's electronic newsletter (E-Notes) at  
[www.bakerbooks.com/academic](http://www.bakerbooks.com/academic)

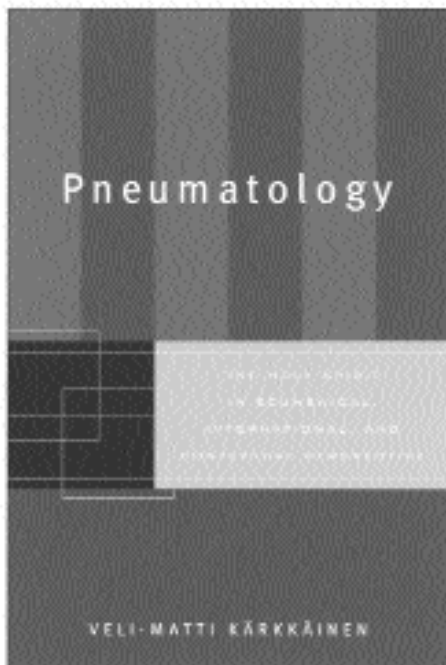
# "Ecumenical, Engaged, Aware, and Alert"

"Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's book provides an excellent introduction to the study of contemporary pneumatology. Kärkkäinen summarizes an impressive array of positions and viewpoints accurately and succinctly without losing sight of the main issues, themes, and theologians. I highly recommend it as an introductory text."

—Simon Chan,  
Trinity Theological College

"Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *Pneumatology* is the most comprehensive yet succinct introductory text to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit on the market today. Here is evangelical theologizing at its best: exuberant, engaged, aware, and alert."

—Amos Yong, Bethel College



0 8010 2668 X • 208 pp. • \$15.99p

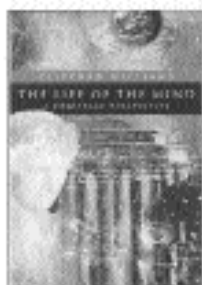
"Somewhat unexpectedly, the Holy Spirit has become a main topic of systematic theology at the end of the second millennium. We can indeed speak of a pneumatological renaissance, but it is difficult to understand the variety of new theologies inspired by this renaissance. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen offers a balanced account of contemporary debates on the Holy Spirit. This instructive overview is always connected with a sincere ecumenical quest to preserve the unity of Christian doctrine."

—Risto Saaremaa, University of Helsinki

## Baker Academic

Subscribe to Baker Academic's electronic newsletter (E-Notes) at  
[www.bakerbooks.com/academic](http://www.bakerbooks.com/academic)

# Restoring EVERYDAY THEOLOGY

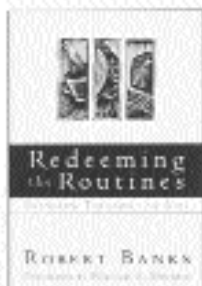


## **The Life of the Mind**

*Clifford Williams*

Do purely intellectual pursuits have a purpose in the lives of Christians? This book examines the importance of intellectual activity, answering common objections and asserting that the acquisition of knowledge, the life of the mind, may justifiably be regarded as a Christian calling.

0-8010-7336-X • \$10.99p • 96 pp.



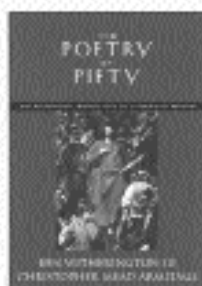
## **Redeeming the Routines**

*Robert Banks*

"This is a wonderful book. Robert Banks shows us that to think theologically can be a very exciting activity of bringing the riches of divine revelation to bear on the complexities of our lives."

*Richard Moore, Fuller Theological Seminary*

0-8010-2116-2 • \$16.99p • 197 pp.

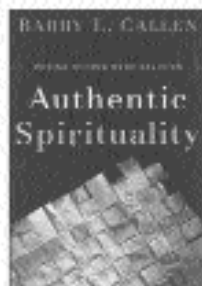


## **The Poetry of Piety**

*Ben Witherington III and Christopher Mead Armistead*

Poetry has always been an elegant, effective means of expression and reflection. This annotated anthology of Christian poetry offers both expert literary and theological analysis of a wide range of Christian poetry from authors including C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and John Updike.

0-8010-2286-X • \$16.99p • 197 pp.



## **Authentic Spirituality**

*Barry L. Callen*

"Barry Callen has written a work on Christian spirituality that invites the reader to a more profound understanding of Christian life and practice. I highly recommend this work."

*Kenneth J. Collins, author, Exploring Christian Spirituality*

0-8010-7288-6 • \$18.99p • 288 pp.

## **Baker Academic**

Subscribe to Baker Academic's electronic newsletter (E Notes) at [www.bakerbook.com/academic](http://www.bakerbook.com/academic)

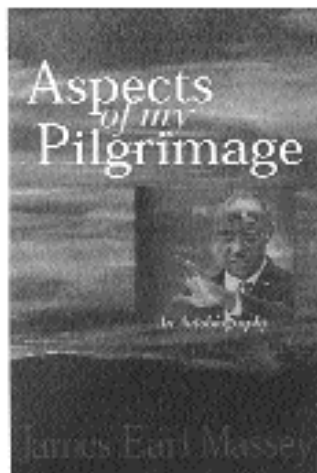


ANDERSON UNIVERSITY PRESS

## Anderson University Press Releases Two Major New Publications

May/June 2002

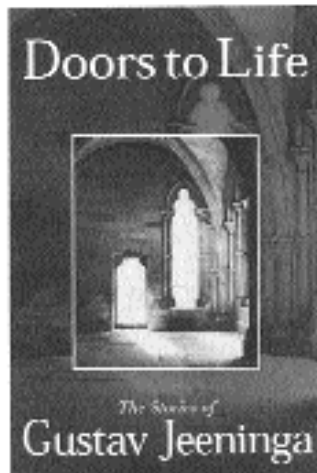
### The Autobiography of Dr. James Earl Massey



ISBN 0-8648882-2-X  
428 pages • Hardcover • \$19.95

The "Prince of Preachers"  
Pastor, Professor, Dean

### The Stories of Dr. Gustav Jeeninga



ISBN 0-8648920-3-8  
784 pages • Softcover • \$17.95

Worldwide Biblical Archaeologist,  
Professor of Biblical Studies

### Outstanding Christian Men of the Classroom and Pulpit Unusual Sources of History and Wisdom

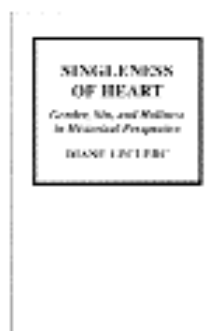
**Ordering Information:** These significant books are available beginning May, 2002, by contacting Warner Press (phone: (800) 441-1727; fax: (800) 347-6411; e-mail: [aporders@warnerpress.org](mailto:aporders@warnerpress.org)). For bulk orders (50 or more) at discount, contact Dr. Barry J. Collins, Editor of All Things (phone: (765) 641-4555; fax: (765) 641-2851; e-mail: [barjcoll@anderson.edu](mailto:barjcoll@anderson.edu)).

For other available titles and publishing priorities, see the website of Anderson University Press at [www.anderson.edu/auspress](http://www.anderson.edu/auspress).

*Winner of 2002 Timothy L. Smith  
and Mildred Bangs Wynkoop Book Award*

# Singleness of Heart

*Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*



DIANE LECLERC

Foreword by Randy L. Maddox

A fresh look at the essence of sin and salvation. Author Diane Leclerc examines fourth-century church fathers such as Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine, as well as John Wesley and Phoebe Palmer, and draws upon current insights to reveal the patriarchy that is present in traditional models of the nature of sin and sanctity.

2001 • 216 pages • ISBN 0-8108-4150-9 • \$50.00 Cloth



**Scarecrow Press, Inc.**

1720 Boston Way  
Lanham, MD 20706

Order online for 15% discount! [www.scarecrowpress.com](http://www.scarecrowpress.com)  
1-800-462-6420





**Officers of the  
Wesleyan Theological Society  
2002-2003**

- President:** **David Bundy**  
Christian Theologian Seminary  
E-Mail . . . dbundy@cts.edu
- First Vice-President:** **Henry H. Knight III**  
St. Paul School of Theology  
E-Mail . . . Halk@spst.edu
- Second Vice-President:** **Philip R. Meadows**  
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary  
E-Mail . . . Philip.Meadows@garrett.edu
- Secretary/Treasurer:** **William C. Kostlevy**  
Asbury Theological Seminary  
E-Mail . . .  
bill\_kostlevy@asburyseminary.edu
- Journal Editor:** **Barry L. Callen**  
Anderson University  
E-Mail . . . bcallen@anderson.edu
- Editorial Committee:** **David Bundy**  
E-Mail . . . dbundy@cts.edu  
**Barry L. Callen, Chair**  
E-Mail . . . bcallen@anderson.edu  
**Stanley Ingersol**  
E-Mail . . . singersol@nazarene.org
- Promotional Secretary:** **Thomas J. Oord**  
Eastern Nazarene College  
E-Mail . . . TheOords@juno.com
- Nominating Committee:** **Sharon Clark Pearson, Chair**  
Anderson University  
E-Mail . . . pearsos@anderson.edu

