

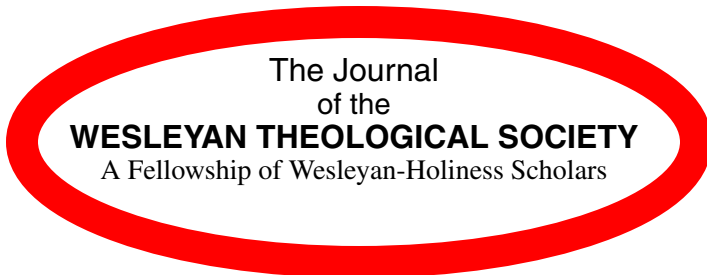
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Wesleyan Theological Journal

Publication of the
Wesleyan Theological Society

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Volume 42, Number 1
Spring, 2007

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

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, Richard Thompson, c/o Spring Arbor University. Membership dues and other financial matters should be addressed to the Secretary-Treasurer, Samuel M. Powell, c/o Wesleyan Theological Society, 3900 Lomaland Dr., San Diego, CA 92106. 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, 3900 Lomaland Dr., San Diego, CA 92106.

Society Web Address: www.wesley.nnu.edu/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
3900 Lomaland Drive
San Diego, CA 92106

Prepared for PDF publication by the
Wesley Center Online
at Northwest Nazarene University.
<http://wesley.nnu.edu>
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Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60606. E-mail: atla@atla.com, or visit <http://www.atla.com/>. Available on-line through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Series), Latham, New York, and DIA-LOG, 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.wesley.nnu.edu/wts

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:

Charles W. Christian	Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho
D. William Faupel	Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.
James N. Fitzgerald	Pastor, Trinity Church of the Nazarene, Texas
Craig Keen	Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California
Jeffrey S. Lamp	Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma
George Lyons	Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho
William H. Malas, Jr.	Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Massachusetts
Christine D. Pohl	Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky
Robert Smith	Point Loma Nazarene University, California
Kenton M. Stiles	Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Theological Union
Jirair S. Tashjian	Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma
Jason E. Vickers	United Theological Seminary, Trotwood, Ohio
Greg Voiles	Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri

BOOK REVIEWERS:

Roger J. Green
Krishana Oxenford Suckau
Jeffery Wittung

EDITOR'S NOTES

The 2006 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened March 2-4, 2006, on the campus of the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, with Carl Campbell of Nassau, Bahamas, functioning as program chair. The theme of the meeting was "Friendship and Hospitality: Wesleyan Perspectives." Meeting jointly with the WTS were the Wesleyan Philosophical Society, the Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Thought, and the Asian Theological Studies Group.

The theme of this 2006 meeting is represented in this issue by a selection of the papers presented on that occasion. Four of them look carefully at various biblical materials and sources that explore friendship and hospitality (Jeffrey Lamp, George Lyons/William Malas, Robert Smith, and Jirair Tashjian). Looking back to the perspectives of John Wesley are the keynote address by Christine Pohl and the article by Jason Vickers. Along with the presidential address by Craig Keen are additional articles that ponder questions like, Is it necessary and/or spiritually dangerous for Christians to be friendly with ungodly people and hospitable to a non-Christian culture? In this issue, one finds addressed subject areas as widely diverse as the arts (Charles Christian), the eucharist (James Fitzgerald), aesthetics (Kenton Stiles), iconography (Greg Voiles), and missionary strategy (William Faupel).

As always, the address of the WTS web site and the email addresses of all current officers of the Society are found in this issue. Also found is an application for membership. Here is who to contact:

1. If you wish to apply for membership—Dr. Sam Powell
2. If you wish to write a book review—Dr. Richard Thompson
3. If you wish to place an ad—Dr. Barry Callen, Editor

Barry L. Callen
Anderson, Indiana

PRACTICING HOSPITALITY IN THE FACE OF “COMPLICATED WICKEDNESS”

The Keynote Address: The Wesleyan Theological
Society’s Annual Meeting, March, 2006

by

Christine D. Pohl

If our understandings of hospitality are limited to a pleasant evening of food and conversation with friends or family, then to speak positively of “practicing hospitality in the face of ‘complicated wickedness’” seems morally outrageous and socially irresponsible. In fact, it is not a pairing of images that John Wesley would have chosen. Instead, he might well have argued that conventional practices of hospitality contributed to the problems of human wickedness and misery by wasting needed resources, reinforcing social distinctions, feeding pride and social distance, and weakening spiritual zeal and sacrificial love.

When Wesley used the term *hospitality* in reference to the practices of English society, which he did very rarely, it was almost always negative and associated with indulgence, waste, and stealing from the poor. In the sermon “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” he wrote that the rich man had “fared sumptuously every day.” Then Wesley challenged:

Reconcile this with religion who can. I know how plausibly the prophets of smooth things can talk in favor of hospitality; of making our friends welcome, of keeping a handsome table, to do honor to religion, of promoting trade and the like. But God is not mocked; He will not be put off with such pretences as these. Whoever thou art that sharest in the sin of this rich

man, were it no other than “faring sumptuously every day,” thou shalt as surely be a sharer in his punishment.¹

Wesley’s estimation of contemporary English hospitality seems to have paralleled that of his contemporary and friend, Samuel Johnson. In response to James Boswell’s question about “how far he thought wealth should be employed in hospitality,” Johnson asserted:

You are to consider that ancient hospitality, of which we hear so much, was in an uncommercial country, when men being idle, were glad to be entertained at rich men’s tables. But in a commercial country, a busy country, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued. No doubt there is still room for a certain degree of it; and a man has a satisfaction in seeing his friends eating and drinking around him. But promiscuous hospitality is not the way to gain real influence. You must help some people at table before others; you must ask some people how they like their wine oftener than others. You therefore offend more people than you please.²

Johnson then suggested more effective ways to gain influence and earn lasting regard, which he related to business enterprises and lending money. For Johnson, what remained of an historically rich moral concept was its outdated usefulness in garnering power and influence. It was antiquated in its deference to rank, and was reduced to the occasional satisfaction of sharing food and drink with friends.

Adam Smith, another of Wesley’s contemporaries, similarly regarded hospitality as reflective of the social arrangements of a previous time, when bonds were established and maintained between rich and poor people by the largesse of the wealthy and the service and obedience of the poor. The grand hospitality offered by the rich aristocratic and clerical households involved the expenditure of enormous resources in providing

¹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, third edition, 1872 (Albany, Ore.: The Sage Digital Library Version 1.1, 1996), [hereafter JWW]. Vol. 7, Sermon CXII: “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” 283.

²James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.* (New York: The Modern Library, 1931), 408. A portion of this quote appears in Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 273.

feasts for friends and persons of influence, and in offering distributions of food or alms to the poor.³

Hospitality in the Christian Tradition

Earlier in the Christian tradition, however, hospitality had been a vibrant practice that included providing food and shelter to friends, fellow believers, and needy strangers, usually in one’s home. It also involved offering respect and recognition to those who were generally overlooked and undervalued in the larger society, and breaking down social boundaries through shared meals and home- or church-based welcome. An understanding of Christian hospitality developed that was both connected to and distinct from conventional understandings of hospitality. Based on the biblical passages of Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 14:12-14, Christians were expected to offer hospitality to those most likely to be overlooked, anticipating that it might be Jesus they were welcoming. According to Jesus’ instructions, when followers welcomed people to their tables, it should be the poor and infirm, those who seemed to have the least to offer.

A sturdy practice of hospitality, and substantial reflection on the significance of welcome, is evident in the early church and throughout the patristic period, especially in the writings of Lactantius, John Chrysostom, and Jerome.⁴ A normative understanding developed that associated hospitality with God’s generous welcome, the person of Jesus, responsibility to care for the weakest members of the larger community, as well as strangers, the importance of sustaining bonds of friendship and care within the community, and with not offering welcome to gain personal advantage. Hospitality had a crucial role in the ancient church in providing care for believers fleeing persecution or traveling to share the gospel, in incorporating new believers into the community, and in reinforcing a new identity.

By the eighteenth century in England, however, a number of historical, ecclesial and sociological factors had combined to remove moral sig-

³See Adam Smith’s comments on hospitality in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), Book II, chap. 3, pp. 331-32; Book III, chap. 4, 385-86; Book V, chap. 1, art. 3, 752-56.

⁴For further discussion, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), chapters 2-4.

nificance from the term *hospitality*. Whereas an ancient writer could assert that in hospitality could be found the practice of the good, by Wesley's day it was incapable of evoking such moral regard.⁵ Hospitality was largely understood as a relic of earlier times, a practice that reinforced social hierarchy, involved large expenditures of resources, and justified extraordinary indulgence. Although for previous centuries in England "keeping hospitality" had been a form of poor relief, by Wesley's time grand hospitality—whether clerical or lay—was both inadequate and unavailable as a response to human need and suffering.⁶ To John Wesley, even the ordinary and more moderate hospitality of persons without wealth was risky in that it was so often wasteful and so frequently degenerated into trifling conversation. He worried that it was a ready distraction from more serious pursuits and from opportunities to serve.

Nevertheless, shared meals, visiting, and conversation were central to the spread of Methodism. In fact, it is noteworthy that Wesley recovered many of the distinctive aspects of the tradition of Christian hospitality without ever describing what he was doing as *hospitality*. My purpose, then, is to look more closely at some of Wesley's activities, observations, and teachings that are related to a richer historic understanding of hospitality, and at how they intersected with a social situation that he described as "complicated wickedness" and "complicated misery."⁷ I approach this research as a Christian ethicist, rather than as a Wesley scholar or historian. However, in my many years of work studying the Christian tradition of offering hospitality to strangers, I have discovered an extraordinary affinity with Wesley. My ongoing commitment is to find ways to invite the tradition to speak to our contemporary context.

⁵See Shepherd of Hermas, *Mandate* 8:8-10, translated in *The Apostolic Fathers*, by Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1914). Vol. 2.

⁶See Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 68, 98-101.

⁷I am indebted to Ron Pohl for his research assistance in identifying all of Wesley's uses of the various terms related to hospitality (e.g., welcome, hospitality, stranger, guest, host, conversation, invite, visit) in the fourteen volumes of Wesley's works. Using the electronic version of Wesley's works, it was possible to do comprehensive word searches.

The Setting of Eighteenth-Century England

Christian ethicists regularly work at the intersection of good and evil, biblical and theological commitments and contemporary culture, the grandeur of God’s good creation and the extraordinary human capacity to perpetrate and perpetuate evil and misery. So I was taken with Wesley’s effort to describe and discern his own times and the implications for God’s care or concern. In his sermon “On Divine Providence,” Wesley asked:

Is the Creator and Preserver of the world unconcerned for what he sees therein? Does he look upon these things either with a malignant or heedless eye? . . . Does he sit at ease in the heaven without regarding the poor inhabitants of earth? It cannot be. . . . We are his children. And can a mother forget the children of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not God forget us. . . . [God] is concerned every moment for what befalls every creature upon earth; and more especially for everything that befalls any of the children of men. It is hard indeed to comprehend this; nay, it is hard to believe it, considering the complicated wickedness, and the complicated misery which we see on every side. But believe it we must, unless we will make God a liar, although it is sure, no man can comprehend it.⁸

The complicated misery that Wesley encountered was a complex intertwining of several fundamental problems: the absence of true religion, a deep social alienation, degradation and oppression, and acute physical need. He spoke of the “complicated affliction” of poverty, pain, and hunger in the biblical account of the poor beggar whose need was obvi-

⁸JWW, Vol. 6, Sermon LXVII: “On Divine Providence,” 354. See also Wesley’s question in Sermon LX: “The General Deliverance”: “If the Creator and Father of every living thing is rich in mercy towards all; if he does not overlook or despise any of the works of his own hands; if he wills even the meanest of them to be happy, according to their degree; how comes it to pass, that such a complication of evils oppresses, yea, overwhelms them? How is it that misery of all kinds overspreads the face of the earth? This is a question which has puzzled the wisest philosophers in all ages: and it cannot be answered without having recourse to the oracles of God” (Vol. 6, 273). Wesley also warned that the American colonists’ demands for freedom, and the increasing likelihood of war, would result in an increase in “complicated misery.” See Sermon CXXX: “National Sins and Miseries,” Vol. 7, 448.

ous, but was ignored by those around him; an affliction made more miserable by the fact that there was no one who would help him.⁹ And he wrote of the “complication of all human wants” that he encountered among the miserable conditions of prisoners and their families. He recognized that at times there was a “complication of sin and misery” at the individual level.¹⁰ Such images powerfully captured the condition of the poor people with whom Wesley so often ministered.

The misery of the poor in eighteenth-century England is well documented, but complicated misery had a very personal face for Wesley. He was haunted by it—by the young girl whose clothing was too thin for winter weather, by the old woman who begged for food but found no relief from pious Christians who blamed her poverty on idleness, by African slaves who had been robbed of their liberty, family and identity.

Wesley used harsh words for those who had a hand in causing human misery. His criticism was not only reserved for those who directly abused others, but was also directed at those who did not recognize any connection between their lifestyle and the ongoing misery of other human beings. And so, regarding them and the results of their willful blindness and heartlessness, he talked about “complicated wickedness” and “complicated villainy.”¹¹

Underlying this wickedness and villainy lay a tangled web of spiritual deadness, greed, and disrespect for human life. Wesley described a “complication of villainies” that characterized English life in its scorn of virtue and its embrace of “injustice, fraud and falsehood.”¹² He called the slave trade “complicated villainy” because its practice was justified by law, bad historical arguments, false accounts, and a deliberate blindness to the truth for the sake of ruthless personal gain. Wesley particularly criticized the deliberate, cultivated ignorance of what was going on, the coop-

⁹JWW, Vol. 7, Sermon CXII: “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” 278.

¹⁰Wesley described the “complicated wickedness” of a hardened sinner in “An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Church’s Remarks,” in JWW, Vol. 8, 481. In “The Doctrine of Original Sin” Wesley asked, “Why is the earth so full of complicated distress? Because it is full of complicated wickedness.” He suggested that persons were not happy because they were not holy (JWW, Vol. 9, 266).

¹¹See JWW, Vol., 8, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part II,” 215, and Vol. 11, “Thoughts Upon Slavery,” 94.

¹²JWW, Vol. 8, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III,” 227.

eration of gentlemen who would not see that their hands, homes, land, and goods were stained with blood.¹³ So “complicated” for Wesley suggested the complex interrelation of spiritual and social death. Without necessarily offering sustained social analysis, he was pressing toward recognizing the interconnections of personal and structural evil and sin, especially in slavery and in gross disparities between wealth and poverty.

Because Wesley’s ministry was so much involved with the poor of England, his understandings of holiness of life and the use of wealth were complexly intertwined. Wesley was deeply troubled by the consequences of early capitalism—many of the Methodists had grown comfortable through their industry, while the destitution of the poor in the same congregations and towns had in some cases increased terribly.¹⁴ For Wesley, there was a sensible solution: resources could be redistributed voluntarily. If Christians would be content to live on what they needed, they could share the rest. In this view, he recovered an ancient church understanding. Everything one had beyond what was necessary, for life and possibly convenience, God had given to the recipient to pass on to the poor. Holding on to more than what was needed stole life from others and goods from God. Wesley wrote that “many of your brethren, beloved of God, have not food to eat; they have not raiment to put on; they have not a place where to lay their head. And why are they thus distressed? Because *you* impiously, unjustly, and cruelly detain from them what your Master and theirs lodges in *your* hands on purpose to supply *their* wants.”¹⁵ Especially in the later part of his life, and as social distress among the poor was increasing along with available resources among many Methodists, this became a significant theme in Wesley’s sermons.

Wesley maintained that wealth that was not shared was destructive of spiritual zeal and commitment; it made people self-indulgent and spiritually and socially irresponsible. For Wesley, this was a case of complicated wickedness. To accumulate wealth and spend it on superfluities when others were in dire need involved a combination of spiritual hardness or death and a willful blindness to human need. It was a reciprocal

¹³JWW, “Thoughts Upon Slavery, 94.

¹⁴See Wesley’s discussion in “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” JWW, vol. 11, and in his various sermons on the dangers of riches.

¹⁵JWW, Vol. 7, Sermon CXVI: “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” 320. See also: Sermon LXXXVIII: “On Dress,” vol. 7, 33-34, 38; and Sermon LI: “The Good Steward,” vol. 6, 170-171.

interaction; the loss of spiritual zeal was reflected in neglect of the poor and the neglect of the poor fed spiritual dying. Wealthier believers were experiencing a slow spiritual death, while poor ones were suffering a slow social and physical destruction. He wrote of those who spent money on unnecessary things—elegant clothing and fancy food:

You bind your own hands. You make it impossible for you to do that good which otherwise you might, so that you injure the poor in the same proportion as you poison your own soul. You might have clothed the naked; but what was due to them was thrown away on your own costly apparel. You might have fed the hungry . . . but the superfluities of your own table swallowed up that whereby they should have been profited. And so this wasting of thy Lord's goods is an instance of complicated wickedness; since hereby thy poor brother perisheth, for whom Christ died.¹⁶

Wesley, who seems to have liked to use *complicated* to get at the interaction of various factors in sin and evil, occasionally also used it more positively. He described the Methodist movement as a “complication of justice, mercy and truth, of every right and amiable temper, beaming forth from the deepest recesses of the mind, in a series of wise and generous actions.”¹⁷ Rejecting any notions of holiness that imagined it could be pursued in separation from others or the world, Wesley wrote that it was in the world that Christians learned “that complication of love and all holy tempers which is exercised in suffering for righteousness’ sake.”¹⁸ Addressing the realities of complicated wickedness and complicated misery required a complication of love, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth.

The response of Wesley to the complicated misery and evil he saw around him was shaped by moral energy and insight, organizational genius, an extraordinary spiritual commitment, and a profound grasp of

¹⁶JWW, vol. 8, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part II,” 215. In another place, Wesley observed that a “complication of pride, luxury, sloth and wantonness, naturally arising from vast wealth and plenty, was the grand hindrance to the spreading of true religion through the cities of North America” (JWW, vol. 7, Sermon CXXXI: “Some Account of the Late Work of God in North-America,” 459).

¹⁷JWW, vol. 9, “A Short Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland,” 204.

¹⁸JWW, vol. 5, Sermon XXIV: “Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV,” 387.

God’s welcome and grace. The remainder of this article will focus on several dimensions of Wesley’s theological and moral understanding and ecclesial practice that were significant in his efforts to address the underlying causes of the wickedness and misery that he discerned. They will be considered through the lens of the hospitality tradition. Wesley’s responses represent a significant effort to address: the social and spiritual apathy of his day, the need for close face-to-face relationships that would foster holiness and growth, the social distance between those with and without material resources, the misuse of resources, and deadly poverty and alienation. In particular, divine/human welcome, the importance of visiting, conversation and friendship, and efforts to challenge willful ignorance will be examined.

Although Wesley did not often use the term *hospitality*, he and the early Methodists were very dependent on its practice. God’s love and welcome were at the heart of Methodist theology. In addition, Wesley recovered dimensions of Christian hospitality that made it more likely for people to see others and their needs, and to resist blindness, hoarding and extravagance by sharing their lives with others.

Welcome in the Divine/Human Relationship

Many of John Wesley’s most profound words of invitation and welcome occur when he is communicating God’s love and welcome to sinners in need of grace. The tenderness and warmth by which he invited others into new life in Christ runs through his sermons and letters. He was passionate and compelling in his efforts to portray a God who genuinely welcomes all who would come to Jesus. He invited those who were strangers to God to find a divine friend. In powerful contrast to the spiritual apathy of so much of his society, and in response to the distance of persons from God, Wesley invited people into vibrant relationship with a loving and living God.¹⁹

The language of invitation in one of Wesley’s sermons is striking: “Come then to the Author and Finisher of faith, confessing thy sins, and the root of all—thy unbelief, til he forgive thy sins and cleanse thee from

¹⁹The love feasts in early Methodism were an expression of intimate divine/human hospitality, accessible to members of the bands quite regularly. See Charles Wallace, “Eating and Drinking with John Wesley: The Logic of his Practice,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 85, nos. 2 and 3 (Summer and Autumn 2003): 151-152.

all unrighteousness. Come to the Friend of sinners, weary and heavy laden, and he will give thee pardon! Cast thy poor desperate soul on his dying love! Enter into the rock, the ark, the city of refuge.”²⁰ Hospitality images are richly employed. Lukan images of hospitality and of God’s gracious and universal welcome, now offered by faithful followers, are also powerfully captured in one of Charles Wesley’s hymns.

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;
 Let every soul be Jesus’ guest;
 Ye need not one be left behind,
 For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;
 The invitation is to all;
 Come all the world; come sinner thou!
 All things in Christ are ready now.

Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,
 Ye restless wanderers after rest;
 Ye poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind,
 In Christ a hearty welcome find.²¹

John Wesley also used the language of hospitality and welcome in painting a picture of the Christian who longed for the blessing of sanctification, so closely tied to a deepened personal relationship with Christ. In “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley wrote, “Christ is ready; and He is all you want, He is waiting for you: He is at the door. Let your inmost soul cry out, ‘Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest! Nor hence again remove; but sup with me, and let the feast be everlasting love.’”²² Here again is a powerful picture of the Christian life in terms of guest/host and divine/human relations of mutual welcome.

For Wesley, Christian love was to reflect the gracious welcome of God which was offered to all. In another sermon, he wrote:

Let love not visit you as a transient guest, but be the constant temper of your soul. See that your heart be filled at all times,

²⁰JWW, vol. 7, Sermon CXXIX: “The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes,” 442.

²¹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7, “A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists,” edited by Franz Hilderbrandt and Oliver A Beckerlegge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 81.

²²JWW, vol. 6, Sermon XLIII: “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” 70.

and on all occasions, with real, undissembled benevolence; not to those only that love you, but to every soul of man. Let it pant in your heart; let it sparkle in your eyes; let it shine on all your actions.²³

Just as every sinner was welcome at the gospel feast because God had invited all humankind, so every faithful Christian was sent by God to proclaim and live that welcome to others. Even Wesley’s instructions on the best general method of preaching included, as his first point, that the preacher was “to invite,” and then to convince, offer Christ, and build up in every sermon.²⁴

This concern that all be welcomed, and that all experience the love of God embodied in God’s people, who in turn offer that love to others, is particularly relevant for Wesley’s response to poor people. In eighteenth-century England, the spiritual needs and capacities of poor people were generally overlooked by the larger society and by the church. Powerless and voiceless regarding religious, social, economic, and political affairs, poor people found a place in early Methodism—a place in which their needs and talents were taken seriously, a place where they were expected to mature in spiritual discipline and good works.²⁵ There was room for them, in the field preaching, small groups, newly formed small-scale institutions, and ultimately in the church. Methodism provided a disciplined structure that demanded and expected much from converts, but also supported people as they learned to take responsibility for their lives and to offer this vibrant love to others.²⁶

As it welcomed them into faith, early Methodism gave previously ignored and excluded people an opportunity to contribute. Expected to learn to articulate their faith, they spoke publicly concerning their spiritual condition and that of the persons they visited. They were expected to minister to other poor people, carefully attentive to the spiritual, social, and physical distress of neighbors and those in prison and workhouses. Out of their minimal resources, they were still expected to share with those in greater need. In response to the welcome they had experienced

²³JWW, vol. 7, Sermon C: “On Pleasing All Men,” 168.

²⁴JWW, vol. 8, “Minutes of Some Late Conversations, Conversation II,” “Question 36,” 369.

²⁵Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Epworth Press, 1945), 220-21.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 241.

from God and the Methodist communities, they were to be actively engaged in ministering to others.²⁷

Friendship, Visiting, and Conversation in Methodist Discipleship

John Wesley wrote to a sister in Dublin that, if she wanted to be an “altogether Christian,” “you must remember you cannot be warm alone; you must needs find one, if not more, with whom you can converse freely on the things of God.”²⁸ To stay alive and warm in faith and commitment, Wesley believed, required holy friendships.

Visiting and holy friendships were crucial in Methodist discipleship and growth. Wesley was deeply persuaded of the importance of edifying conversation, and conversation seems to have been the link between hospitality, visiting, and friendship.²⁹ In the earliest days of Methodism, there was a strong emphasis on visiting that was primarily oriented to nurturing spiritual growth, accountability, and godly conversation. As the movement grew, however, this became unwieldy as a major approach to discipleship and some of the close personal interaction of individual visiting was organized into small group meetings—societies and classes.³⁰

Visiting, shared meals, and conversation remained central to Methodist practice. Wesley wrote that “the time of taking our food is usually a time of conversation also; as it is natural to refresh our minds while we refresh our bodies.” He suggested how conversation might be ordered rightly so that it was good, on good subjects, so it “ministers grace to the hearers” rather than “fluttering about anything that occurs.”³¹ He warned of “foolish” and “wanton” talking that was unhelpful.³² He was very critical of mystic demands that suggested withdrawal from conversation was a way to measure or develop holiness.³³

²⁷*Ibid.*, 223.

²⁸JWW, vol. 13, Letter DCCCXLV, 153. See vol. 12, Letter CCCCXXVII, 457, where Wesley also connects visiting and conversation with staying warm.

²⁹JWW, vol. 12, Letter CXIV, 188, and Letter CXL, 209.

³⁰See JWW, Vol. 8, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” p. 284, for Wesley’s explanation of this shift. See also vol. 8, “Minutes of Some Late Conversations, Conversation II,” 377-378.

³¹JWW, vol. 7, Sermon LXXXIX: “The More Excellent Way,” 47; see also vol. 10, “An Address to the Clergy,” 587, and vol. 11, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 436.

³²JWW, vol. 7, Sermon CXXXIV: “True Christianity Defended,” 507.

³³JWW, vol. 9, “An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law,” 580-581.

Wesley wrote often of having been welcomed into homes for meals and conversation (an ordinary understanding of hospitality). He was profoundly dependent on the hospitality of people scattered across England, Ireland, Scotland, and the continent as he traveled. His journals are filled with notations about “agreeable” evenings of shared meals and edifying, fruitful conversations with Christians in many places.³⁴ He was wary of friendships, however, that might draw persons away from the Christian life. Friendships, as well as visiting, could devolve into trifling, unprofitable conversation which wasted time.³⁵ He was also critical of chatting, recommending instead a “cheerful seriousness” in conversation worthy of Jesus Christ.³⁶ Conversation, in his mind, was a context for increase in brotherly love.³⁷ But even religious settings were risky, and he warned against “pious chit chat, and religious gossiping,” recommending care that conversation not extend too long in order to avoid moving in that direction.³⁸ Because extended conversation and friendship with the world could lead to spiritual coldness, Wesley urged persons to stay “warm” by

³⁴See numerous references in Wesley’s journals from 1773-1790 (JWW, vol. 4). For example, see vol. 4, 85. His occasional comment about people having failed to offer food or drink when he was with them in their homes suggests that it was an expected act of courtesy (see vol. 4, 346). Wesley occasionally described a negative experience of finding no welcome in a place or of having had welcome or an invitation suddenly withdrawn.

A very interesting recent discussion of Wesley’s visiting is found in Jonathan Rodell, “‘The Best House by far in Town’: John Wesley’s Personal Circuit” (*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 85, nos. 2 and 3 (Summer and Autumn 2003), 111-122). Rodell’s work suggests that Wesley was a guest in many different kinds of homes, sometimes staying in very comfortable surroundings. Some of his hosts were quite wealthy Christians (not exclusively Methodists), who, while uncomfortable with the social leveling of the class meetings, were happy to host the leader of the movement in their homes. Rodell suggests that in some cases this reflected “a pattern of patronage rather than participation” (121). I am grateful to Randy Maddox for directing me to this article.

³⁵See for example, JWW, vol. 6, Sermon LXXX: “On Friendship with the World,” 505-506, and Sermon LXXXI: “In What Sense We Are to Leave the World,” 520.

³⁶JWW, vol. 12, Letter DIII, 506.

³⁷JWW, vol. 2, Journals, 254.

³⁸JWW, vol. 11, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” “Question 35,” 506.

seeking conversation with those “that are most alive” spiritually, those that are “athirst for God” and for “full salvation.”³⁹

He suggested that a person who wanted to avoid the snares of friendship with the world should “invite no unholy person to your house, unless on some very particular occasion.” While it was possible and proper to be civil and courteous to every person, Wesley also recommended a certain aloofness. He further warned, “On no account accept any invitation from an unholy person.”⁴⁰ In Wesley’s writings, it is possible to discern a complex combination of distance and love, close conversation and some wariness due to his recognition of the power of social relationships. His strong expectation that faithful Christians would love and care for friends, strangers, and enemies was in some tension with a concern that faithful believers not put themselves in close relationships with persons who could undermine spiritual commitments.⁴¹

Although Wesley occasionally described one of his hosts as hospitable, he almost never described the event or experience as *hospitality*. The main exception was when referring to his experiences in foreign lands, or the experiences of foreigners in Britain; in these cases, he actually used the term *hospitality*. In such contexts, he readily commented on its pleasant provision in Holland, or on its distressing and outrageous absence in other places, along with some sharp observations about the mistreatment of strangers that such inhospitality represented.⁴² There is no doubt that he knew the traditions—both philosophical and theological—of hospitality.

Because of his travels and extraordinary preaching schedule, and his emphasis on face-to-face discipleship, Wesley was continually visiting, always as a guest. Through his letters and visiting, he sustained an enor-

³⁹JWW, vol. 2, Journals, 193; vol. 12, Letter LXXVII, 157; Letter LXXX, 159; Letter CXIV, 187-188.

⁴⁰JWW, vol. 6, Sermon LXXXI: “In What Sense We are to Leave the World,” 522.

⁴¹This was a concern whether the temptation came from contact with persons involved in sin of the gross or more refined type. See JWW, vol. 6, Sermon LXVIII: “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” 370-371.

⁴²JWW, vol. 4, Journals, 284-286, 346. Wesley was especially taken with the hospitality he experienced in Holland, because its reputation had led him to expect otherwise (vol. 4, 284-286). He also commented on the inhospitality of custom house officers and the mistreatment of strangers in vol. 12, Letter CCC-CXLVIII, 469.

mous number of friendships. But he does not seem to have used his experiences as a stranger in need of welcome, or as a guest who found comfort and provision in the home of a friend, to reflect on the practice of hospitality or on its importance.⁴³ He rarely discussed hospitality or hosting; somehow, people did not need to be encouraged to welcome guests. Interestingly, the early Methodist experience replicated the practice of Jesus’ disciples and the early church leaders who depended on the hospitality of others for both reception of the message and the messenger.⁴⁴ But for some reason, whereas in the New Testament and early church, and in much of the tradition, there are discussions of the important role of the host and communities that welcome and provide, this does not receive attention in Wesley’s writings.

In some writings by and about the women in early Methodism, however, we are able to get a fuller glimpse into the role of hosting. Paul Chilcote notes that women “invited and hosted the widening circle of itinerant preachers.” Some Methodist women made their homes centers of renewal, sites for meetings and preaching, and places of welcome for traveling preachers.⁴⁵ Women were also the “housekeepers” in the London, Bristol, and Newcastle headquarters of Methodism. Chilcote notes:

[The] housekeeper was an office within the Methodist institutional structure which entailed serious managerial and spiritual responsibilities. Sarah Ryan was one of the earliest housekeepers and viewed her provision of hospitality and the maintenance of order among her appointed “family” to be serious aspects of her Christian vocation.⁴⁶

⁴³Interestingly, his friend and co-worker Adam Clarke used the term *hospitality* more frequently, partly because he was commenting on specific biblical texts, but he also associated his own experiences of being a needy stranger with the practice of hospitality in a way that Wesley did not.

⁴⁴JWW, vol. 4, Journals, 197, 321, 336, 342, 432.

⁴⁵Paul W. Chilcote, *She Offered them Christ* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1993, 2001), 26-29. See also the accounts of women such as Margaret Davidson for more explicit discussions of hospitality in *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women*, by Paul W. Chilcote (Nashville: Kingswood/Abingdon, 2001, 125-129). Grace Murray’s hospitality is discussed in Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, N.J.: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1991), 74-75.

⁴⁶Chilcote, *Her Own Story*, 30-31. See also Charles Wallace, “Eating and drinking with John Wesley,” 137-155, esp. 146.

In terms of the ordinary provision of food and shelter, we virtually never encounter Wesley in the role of a host. His own home seems rarely to have been a site for hospitality; and with his continual travel and lack of strong associations with a particular place, being a host was not a significant part of his identity.

Nevertheless, Wesley had a crucial role in helping people to see the welcome of God into the kingdom and in creating contexts and structures that made a place for those who had ordinarily been excluded. Aspects of his leadership and his engagement with poor people and others also suggest a hospitable disposition, but still he was more likely to be a guest than a host in many of these settings. Even in the context of the home for widows and orphans, which Wesley helped to establish, he was a guest at meals there while rejoicing that the institution they had founded so inadvertently looked like something from the ancient church's hospitality—and interestingly, he did not call the Methodist expression a form of hospitality.⁴⁷

Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that Wesley's emphasis with the early Methodists was almost entirely on visiting rather than hosting people. It was a significant shift from prior understandings of hospitality. Wesley strongly encouraged his people to go to others, seeing and visiting them, and even the Matthew 25 passage on welcoming the stranger was sometimes reoriented as a result. When Wesley wrote about good works (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, or responding to the needs of the stranger from Matthew 25), he often used the biblical language of inviting or taking in the stranger. He wrote about entertaining or welcoming the stranger. He referred to Matthew 25 frequently—but, in a surprising number of places, he wrote instead about “assisting” or “relieving” the stranger, thus reorienting the provision and location of care and the role of the one who provided it.⁴⁸

Many of Wesley's instructions about visiting had to do with going to poor people—where they lived or could be found—in order to render aid. However, this was only one aspect of an emphasis on visiting which was

⁴⁷See JWW, vol. 8, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” 297-298.

⁴⁸See, for example, JWW, vol. 1, Journals, 314; Vol. 6, Sermon LI: “The Good Steward,” 171, and Sermon LIX: “God's Love to Fallen Man,” 267. See also vol. 7, Sermon XCVIII: “On Visiting the Sick,” 141; Sermon XCIX: “The Reward of the Righteous,” 153; Sermon CXX: “On the Wedding Garment,” 354; and Sermon CXXVI: “On the Danger of Increasing Riches,” 402.

more generally crucial to sustaining discipleship. In 1759, Wesley wrote, “I rode to Colchester, and found that out of the hundred and twenty-six I had left here last year, we had lost only twelve; in the place of whom we had gained forty. . . . Such is the fruit of visiting from house to house.”⁴⁹ But it was purposeful visiting that Wesley commended, not the trite or “insipid” entertainment he seems to have identified with contemporary practices of hospitality.⁵⁰

Wesley worried that some forms of visiting were very unhelpful and remarked, “It has been complained also, that people crowd into the Preachers’ houses, as into coffee-houses, without any invitation. Is this right? It is utterly wrong. Stop it at once. Let no person come into the Preacher’s house, unless he wants to ask a question.”⁵¹ Here there is no discussion or acknowledgment of the preacher’s house or home as a proper location of hospitality, or development of a preacher’s role as host.

In another place, Wesley advised Sarah Ryan, as part of a disciplined lifestyle, to “suffer no impertinent visitant, no unprofitable conversation, in the house. It is a city set upon an hill: and all that is in it should be ‘holiness to the Lord.’”⁵² Sentiments and comments such as these suggest that Wesley was attempting to amend a practice that was often associated with luxury and indulgence, or, even more frequently, with trifling conversation, petty pride, and a waste of time.⁵³ Instead, he forged a different model—one of purposive engagement and conversation, still largely in the context of the home, although not necessarily one’s own home, and decidedly not like casual entertaining. Such ministry was the responsibility of women and men alike.

⁴⁹JWW, vol. 13, “A Short History of the People Called Methodists,” 418. In a similar vein, Wesley wrote, “By repeated experiments we learn that though a man preach like an angel, he will neither collect, nor preserve a society which is collected, without visiting them from house to house” (JWW, vol. 2, Journals, 525). He continually refers in his writings to his practice of visiting classes and societies, and to visiting the individuals that made them up. In another journal entry, he recorded, “I began at the east end of town to visit the society from house to house. I know no branch of the pastoral office which is of greater importance than this. But it is so grievous to flesh and blood, that I can prevail on few, even of our Preachers, to undertake it” (JWW, vol. 4, Journals 9).

⁵⁰JWW, vol. 12, Letter CCIV, 274.

⁵¹JWW, vol. 8, “Minutes of Several Conversations,” “Question 69,” 391.

⁵²JWW, vol. 12, Letter CLXXXV, 251.

⁵³JWW, vol. 6, Sermon L: “The Use of Money,” 154.

A central dimension of discipleship and responsibility included regular visiting of those in need—poor people, the sick and infirm, and prisoners, and as much as possible offering physical help, instruction, and spiritual guidance.⁵⁴ Visiting the sick and infirm poor was, in the Christian tradition, understood as a form of hospitality. Wesley's work differs from the tradition in that there is little mention of opening one's home to needy strangers or even to the local poor.

An emphasis on going to those in need would allow the helper or visitor to assess needs and situations, determine the legitimacy of any requests, and gain a fuller sense of the person's familial situation. Visiting was a route to understanding, sympathy and practical care, while also controlling for unscrupulous misuse of charity. It could challenge the apathy of those with resources and address the needs of those without them.⁵⁵

With a focus on visiting rather than on hosting, help and conversation could be more strategic and more bounded. A visitor could go and help without losing time in unedifying conversation or to entanglements not easily undone. The visitor to those in need is not exactly a guest, but neither is he or she a host, but functions in a role slightly more marginal to the hospitality tradition, that of a helper with particular tasks. In the Methodist movement, this role was soon formalized in many of the societies as a "sick visitor."⁵⁶

An emphasis on visiting was important for poor and rich alike.⁵⁷ It allowed those with very few resources to be of assistance to others. Even

⁵⁴Throughout Wesley's journals are numerous references to his visits to those who were sick, poor, dying, and in prison. This sort of visiting was a regular practice of his entire life, and one which he continually urged others to emulate.

⁵⁵See the important and helpful discussion of visiting in Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 53-58.

⁵⁶See the section on "visitors of the sick," in JWW, vol. 8, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," 293, 295. In 1741 and 1748, Wesley explicitly addressed the role of the sick visitor, who was responsible to visit every sick person within his or her district three times a week, inquiring into the condition of their souls and bodies, and offering advice, assistance, and relief. See also, JWW, vol. 7, Sermon XCVIII: "On Visiting the Sick."

⁵⁷See Randy L. Maddox's important discussion in "'Visit the Poor': John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers," in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. Richard P. Heizenrater (Nashville: Kingswood/Abingdon, 2002), 59-81.

if they did not personally have food or space to share, they could still give themselves and what the community had collected. But visiting also required that those with resources cross social boundaries to care for poor persons. In going to the poor, visitors were drawn into the world of utterly destitute persons, and gained important insights into their needs. Helpers were thus better equipped to respond with innovative efforts, small-scale institutions, programs and approaches that could be helpful. Such insights also allowed Wesley and other coworkers to speak with authority about what they had seen and how situations might be remedied.

Very occasionally, Wesley distinguished between helping persons in need and forming friendships with them, and this may have been a grudging acknowledgment of the reticence of some to cross social boundaries.⁵⁸ In one particular case, he wrote, “what I advise you is, not to contract a friendship, or even acquaintance, with poor, inelegant, uneducated persons; but frequently, nay constantly, to visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless, in their affliction; and this, although they should have nothing to recommend them, but that they are bought with the blood of Christ.”⁵⁹ He encouraged the same woman to have conversation with faithful poor people. He wrote:

I have found some of the uneducated poor who have exquisite taste and sentiment; and many, very many, of the rich who have scarcely any at all. But I do not speak of this: I want you to converse more, abundantly more, with the poorest of the people, who, if they have not taste, have souls, which you may forward in their way to heaven. And they have (many of them) faith, and the love of God, in a larger measure than any persons I know. Creep in among these, in spite of dirt, and a hundred disgusting circumstances; and thus put off the gentlewoman. Do not confine your conversation to genteel and elegant people.⁶⁰

We have, at this point, come full circle in the discussion of the importance of visiting or hospitality in formation and discipleship when we note that visiting the sick and poor was central to the spiritual formation of those who wanted to grow in holiness.⁶¹ The practice became a significant

⁵⁸Maddox, 77-80.

⁵⁹JWW, vol. 12, Letter CCLXXI, 345.

⁶⁰JWW, vol. 12, Letter CCLXX, 344.

⁶¹See Maddox, 76-81.

barometer of commitment. Wesley viewed a slacking off of visiting as an expression of the loss of spiritual commitment and zeal. He wrote poignantly:

You once pushed on, through cold or rain, or whatever cross lay in your way, to see the poor, the sick, the distressed. You went about doing good, and found out those who were not able to find you. You cheerfully crept down into their cellars, and climbed up into their garrets, to “supply all their wants, and spend and be spent in assisting his saints.” You found out every scene of human misery, and assisted according to your power.⁶²

How did he explain the change? They had lost their zeal due to newly acquired wealth and a resulting pride and pleasure in their upward mobility, characteristics of the “complicated wickedness” Wesley had hoped to address through the disciplines of visiting and holy friendship.

**Helping People To See and To Be Seen:
Challenging Pseudo-Innocence and Willful Blindness**

Part of the complicated misery of the poor and the complicated wickedness of those with resources was that the poor were invisible and their misery was hidden, sometimes by design. Wesley wrote:

One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that . . . one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it—and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart. “Indeed, sir” (said a person of large substance), “I am a very compassionate man. But to tell you the truth, I do not know anybody in the world that is in want.” How did this come to pass? Why, he took good care to keep out of their way.⁶³

⁶²JWW, vol. 7, Sermon LXXXVII: “The Danger of Riches,” 26.

⁶³JWW, vol. 7, Sermon XCVIII: “On Visiting the Sick,” 141-142. See also JWW, vol. 4, Journals, 103, in which Wesley wrote, “I began visiting those of our society who lived in Bethnal-Green hamlet. Many of them I found in such poverty as few can conceive without seeing it. O why do not all the rich that fear God constantly visit the poor? Can they spend part of their spare time better? Certainly not.”

Charity at a distance was not adequate because it did not challenge the nearly intransigent social boundaries of the society.

Wesley was persuaded that only as persons got to know one another would they begin to appreciate their human and spiritual common ground. He was particularly concerned about the social distance that hid poverty and need from those who could help, not only because it cut people off from needed resources. It also insulated people seeking to grow in the Christian life from a means of grace and transformation. To a woman concerned about her Christian life and perfection, Wesley wrote several letters urging her to spend time with the poor. In one, he explained:

The lengthening of your life, and the restoring of your health, are invaluable blessings. But do you ask, how you shall improve them to the glory of the Giver? And are you willing to know? Then I will tell you how. Go and see the poor and sick in their own poor little hovels. Take up your cross, woman. Remember the faith! Jesus went before you, and will go with you. Put off the gentlewoman: You bear a higher character. You are an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ.⁶⁴

Because Wesley was concerned that people with power and resources deliberately avoided seeing the consequences of their inaction or action, his valuing of face-to-face relationships and his naming of pseudo-innocence were very important.

One of the reasons Wesley was so insistent on face-to-face relations was that it was through such experiences that he had begun to understand complicated misery and how he might best respond. Out of his experiences with visiting prisoners, talking with Africans who were slaves, and knowing countless poor people, he understood their condition better than most of his contemporaries. He was convinced that if people saw with their own eyes the distress of fellow human beings, and paid attention to what they were seeing, they would change their lifestyles and give generously of their resources.

A commitment to seeing and responding stands behind one of the most interesting efforts of Wesley's day. Early Methodists founded Strangers' Friend Societies in a number of the larger cities in England and Ireland. Wesley described the societies as one of the fruits of Methodism.⁶⁵ They were formed to meet the needs of the urban poor (“sick,

⁶⁴JWW, vol. 12, Letter CCLXIX, 344.

⁶⁵JWW, vol. 4, Journals, 529.

friendless strangers”) who were not part of the Methodist societies and who had no one to help them. The *Leeds Intelligencer* wrote about the society formed at Manchester, noting that it had

undertaken the arduous task of visiting in person the place where the poorest and most wretched outcasts of this community are to be found. Those who have no claim to relief from any parish are continuously experiencing the complicated miseries incident to the most forlorn state to which human nature can be reduced, that of living amongst opulence and comfort, the victims of disease, nakedness, and want.⁶⁶

It was in such works as these—visiting and assisting those caught in the web of complicated misery—that the complication of love, holiness, and mercy could be worked out in a person’s life.

Wesley understood the mutuality of ministry—it was not only the recipient who benefited from ministrations; those who gave care were also transformed. This recaptured a patristic appreciation for the value of good works that had largely disappeared with the Reformation. For Wesley, God’s grace seemed particularly present in acts of care, visiting, and Christian conversation. Everyone could expect to be transformed. In several sermons, he maintained that works of mercy as well as works of piety were real means of grace, a means of grace to the doer, not just the recipient.⁶⁷

Concluding Observations

Like Christian writers before him, Wesley insisted that every person was our neighbor, and especially anyone in need. Because of God’s universal love, Christians also were expected to care with the broadest and most comprehensive response. But such a universal understanding of neighbor could readily collapse into a very abstract and distant sentiment that had little meaning for how a person responded to a particular stranger or neighbor. Wesley resisted this by insisting on close face-to-face interaction with the poor and needy persons of English society.

Both in his assessment of complicated wickedness, and in his fascinating efforts to link holiness, friendship, and good works, Wesley reminds us of the complex interaction between spiritual deadness and social heartlessness, and of the ongoing threat that money and status pose

⁶⁶Quoted in Wearnmouth, 212-213.

⁶⁷For example, see JWW, vol. 7, Sermon XCVIII: “On Visiting the Sick.”

to spiritual growth, holiness, community, and truthful seeing. By viewing works of mercy as a means of grace to the giver, the settings associated with hospitality, welcome, and care become holy ground, a place where everyone can expect to be transformed. When acts of care and helping are viewed in this way, inclinations on the part of helpers to see themselves exclusively as benefactors are challenged. Helpers too are recipients in this complex mutuality of grace, and a more egalitarian posture in relationships is reinforced.

Wesley seems to have understood that if the hold of complicated misery was to be broken, it would require change at multiple levels. He discovered that significant change occurred at the level of sustained interpersonal relationships. Here, attitudes and behaviors could be challenged, status boundaries could be addressed and transcended, and people could understand and enter each other's worlds. At this level, formerly voiceless persons could learn to speak, and socially blind persons could learn to see and to feel. While this is certainly not the sole route to change, nor the only one Wesley took, it is often overlooked by exclusive emphases on either change brought about by individual conversion or changes needed at the macro or structural level for human well-being. This middle level, the realm of friendship, face-to-face relations, gestures, and solidarity, is essential for permanent transformation toward wholeness and holiness.⁶⁸

The significance of interpersonal relations in transformation is a vital contribution from Wesley. He understood better than most the powerful value of being *with* people, connecting with their lives and helping them to become established in a network of relations. Within these relationships, change and empowerment could happen, and holiness and responsibility could be forged and reinforced. In a time when community ties were weakening, the emphasis on visiting, friendship and conversation, and on the formation of Methodist societies, classes and bands, offered regular opportunities for intense personal interaction, relationship-building, and oversight of new believers. This was crucial in forging new communities, shaping transformed identities, and sustaining spiritual warmth, energy, and engagement.

Wesley's focus on visiting rather than on encouraging Methodists to open their homes had several important consequences. While the tradition has always affirmed the importance of visiting the sick and prisoners,

⁶⁸See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, revised ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), xxxviii.

there is a distinctive shift in Wesley away from encouraging home-based hospitality—a concern that was much more prominent in Chrysostom, Luther, and Calvin. But, in Wesley’s day, the expectation that the poor would go to those with resources in search of help may have been undermined by contemporary attitudes toward the poor and toward poor relief. Given the great division between rich and poor people, “visiting” may have been a more promising way to make connections. With the poor often being the providers of assistance, “visiting” may also have been a crucial adaptation to changed social circumstances as well as a sensible way to offer ministry and develop relationships.

The heavy emphasis on going to those in need, however, also opens up a greater possibility that helping might take the form of brief forays into the world of the poor. Such encounters are entirely determined by the visitor/helper, and it is quite possible to insulate the rest of one’s life, experiences, and decisions from the brief encounter. A professionalization of visiting, first in the form of “friendly visiting” and later in the development of the field of social work, seems a significant consequence. A model of assistance that involves a professionalization of care and some distancing between provider and recipient results in a flattening of relations, and eventually in assumptions that help and benefit flow only in one direction.

As a result of the strong emphasis on visiting, and of the experiences of Wesley and other leaders as guests, we do not find in Wesley’s writings much formation around, or reflection on, the host’s role in making room, except in terms of God’s welcome. The distinctive graces one might learn from opening one’s home to others are not developed. Visitors do not need to be as self-revelatory as hosts would need to be in their own homes, and the social barriers that are broken down in visiting are slightly different from those in hosting. Additionally, visiting is largely a practice of individuals, whereas hosting often would involve an entire household in ministry.⁶⁹

For a number of years, I have suggested that Wesley recovered the practice of hospitality without the language, and that one of the consequences is that later generations did not have ready access to a vibrant

⁶⁹It is interesting to note, however, that visiting also allowed individual converts significant opportunity to engage in ministries of hospitality, even if the rest of their own household was unpersuaded of, or hostile to, a commitment to ministry with poor people.

and important tradition, and I still think that argument is true. I am, however, now also persuaded that the story of Wesley and hospitality is more complicated because he did shift some of the focus in hospitality from hosting to the significance of going to people. More than many leaders before him, Wesley replicated the patterns of both Jesus and Paul as primarily guests in their ministry. However, with the diminished emphasis on hosting, which was partly a reflection of social and historical circumstances, there is also little sense of the power of hospitality to invite people into a way of life. Furthermore, there is little recognition that the host could be shaped by the experience of giving hospitality, or could do formation in the context of hospitality. While it is evident that many Methodists were hosts—someone was welcoming Wesley and the other traveling teachers and preachers and hosting the small group meetings—there was not much reflection on it. For later generations, the importance of offering oneself and one’s home in a transformative sort of hospitality was overlooked.

Nevertheless, few movements have taken more seriously the importance of conversation and friendship to growth and holiness. As strange and rigorous as Wesley’s warnings about unhelpful conversations and friendships might seem to us today, he offered important insights into the power of relationships, and especially of conversation, to form and deform us. Wesley leaves us with a complicated legacy, a legacy that reminds us that faithful Christian disciples in any day can find ways to address the complicated misery and evil in the world with a complication of divine and human work, welcome, challenge, and love.

ON FRIENDSHIP: JOHN WESLEY'S ADVICE TO THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS

by

Jason E. Vickers

In recent years there has been growing scholarly interest in Christian understandings of friendship. On the one hand, historians have worked to come to grips with early and medieval Christian understandings of friendship.¹ On the other hand, theologians have begun to engage in constructive theological reflection on the subject.²

The primary goal of this essay is to add to this growing body of historical scholarship by examining John Wesley's understanding of friendship. The founder of Methodism had a lot to say on the subject, much of which will surprise or even offend readers today. Given the amount of relevant material at hand, it is task enough to identify the main features of Wesley's understanding of friendship, leaving for another time the constructive task of evaluating, criticizing, and perhaps re-appropriating his

¹For classical views on friendship, see *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, edited by John T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). For the fourth century, see Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For medieval views, see Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350-1250* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988).

²For constructive proposals, see David Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), and Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). Also see Paul Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).

views. I will conclude this essay by discussing briefly the sources of Wesley's views and by raising some initial questions that will need to be answered if his views are to be re-appropriated today.

John Wesley's understanding of friendship can be divided into two main parts. On the one hand are his many remarks concerning friendship with the "ungodly" or with persons "of the world." For Wesley, the terms 'ungodly' and 'of the world' refer to persons who neither love nor fear God and who are therefore not seeking to lead lives pleasing to God. On the other hand are his instructions to the Methodists regarding their friendships with one another and with other Christians. I will use this two-part schema to aid in pulling together and organizing the material on friendship in Wesley's sermons, letters, journals and diaries.³

Wesley on Friendship With the Ungodly

As Wesley's views on friendship with the ungodly can be rather startling for contemporary readers, it may help first to note a few passages in which Wesley exhorts the early Methodists to love not only their friends but also their enemies. For example, Wesley says, "Because you love God you love your brother also. You love not only your friends, but your enemies; *not only the friends, but even the enemies of God.*"⁴ Similarly, Wesley says that we are to "love [the ungodly] as ourselves (for they also are included in the word 'neighbor') . . . to bear them real goodwill . . . [and] to honour them . . . as immortal spirits who are capable of knowing, of loving, and of enjoying [God] to all eternity."⁵

Elsewhere Wesley goes further, insisting that Christians ought to love friends and enemies *in exactly the same manner*. He writes, "Love friends and enemies as thy own soul. And let thy love be *long-suffering*, and patient towards all men. Let it be *kind*, soft, benign: inspiring thee with the most amiable sweetness, and the most fervent tender affection."⁶

³See especially *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984 –), henceforth *Works*, and *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. 3rd. ed., Thomas Jackson, ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872); reprint ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), henceforth, Jackson, *Works*.

⁴Sermon 52: "The Reformation of Manners," v.7 (*Works*, II: 321), emphasis added.

⁵Sermon 80: "On Friendship with the World," 8 (*Works*, III: 130).

⁶Sermon 33: "Sermon on the Mount VIII," III.10 (*Works*, I: 697), emphasis original.

Wesley calls this “catholic or universal love,” noting that, while a Christian may be “united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular congregation,” he also finds his heart “enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies.”⁷

Clearly, Wesley thinks that Christians ought to love all persons. Yet he persistently points out that loving the ungodly can be dangerous to one’s own spiritual well-being. Consequently, while Wesley advocates love for enemies, including the enemies of God, he also urges the Methodists not to enter into friendships with the ungodly. For Wesley, loving one’s enemies and abstaining from friendship with the ungodly are required of all Christians by plain commands in scripture. Regarding the latter practice, he puts the matter bluntly, saying, “[Scripture] clearly requires us to keep at a distance, as far as is practicable, *from all ungodly men.*”⁸

The strength of Wesley’s conviction that Christians ought to avoid friendship with the ungodly is evidenced by the meticulous guidelines that he developed to help regulate the Methodists’ interaction with the ungodly. These guidelines naturally fall into five basic categories, including guidelines for (1) routine business transactions with the ungodly, (2) sharing the Gospel with the ungodly, (3) relations between the sexes, (4) interaction with the wealthy, and (5) relations with lapsed Methodists. The following are examples of these guidelines in that order.

First, Wesley permits the Methodists to interact with the ungodly in routine business affairs. Thus, he says,

Were we not to converse at all with men of those characters it would be impossible to transact our temporal business. So that every conscientious Christian would have nothing to do but to flee into the desert. It would not suffice to turn recluses, to shut ourselves up in monasteries or nunneries; for even then we must have some intercourse with ungodly men in order to procure the necessaries of life.⁹

⁷Sermon 39: “Catholic Spirit,” III.4 (*Works*, II: 94).

⁸Sermon 81: “In What Sense we are to Leave the World,” 4 (*Works*, III: 144), emphasis added.

⁹Sermon 81: “In What Sense We are to Leave the World,” 6 (*Works*, III: 145).

Elsewhere, Wesley acknowledges the need to interact with the ungodly for business purposes, but he advises the Methodists to exercise caution in doing so. Here we get our first evidence of Wesley's belief that interaction with the ungodly is spiritually dangerous activity. Indeed, the metaphor that Wesley uses suggests that Christians ought to wear asbestos gloves when offering a helping hand to the ungodly. He writes,

We may doubtless converse with them, first, on business, in the various purposes of this life . . . secondly, when courtesy requires it—only we must take great care not to carry it too far; thirdly, when we have a reasonable hope of doing them good. But here too, we have an especial need of caution, and of much prayer; otherwise, we may easily burn ourselves in striving to pluck other brands out of the burning.¹⁰

Having approved routine business interactions with the ungodly, Wesley quickly applies the emergency brakes, urging the Methodists not to go beyond this. He remarks, “We should have no *needless conversation* with them. It is our duty and our wisdom to be no oftener and no longer with them that is strictly necessary.”¹¹

Second, Wesley extends the logic of the guidelines for conducting routine business to the practice of evangelism. He says:

It is indeed with a good design, and from a real desire of promoting the glory of God, that many of [the Methodists] admit of familiar conversation with men that know not God. You have a hope of awakening them out of sleep, and persuading them to seek the things that make for their peace. But if after a competent time of trial you can make no impression upon them, it will be your wisdom to give them up to God. Otherwise you are more likely to receive hurt from them than to do them any good. For if you do not raise their hearts to heaven, they will draw yours down to earth.¹²

¹⁰Sermon 80: “On Friendship with the World,” 10 (*Works*, III: 131).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 132.

¹²Sermon 81:151. It is interesting to note that, in earlier sermons, Wesley's advice was not nearly as severe. He encouraged persons to share the gospel in all their conversations without warning them to withdraw as soon as it was evident that they were making “no impression upon them.” For example, see Sermon 24: “Sermon on the Mount, IV,” IV.1-4 (*Works*, I: 547-49).

Third, Wesley turns to the relationship between the sexes. If Wesley discouraged friendship between godly and ungodly persons, then he was especially alarmed by the thought of friendship between godly men and ungodly women. He comments:

But as dangerous as it is to converse familiarly with men that know not God, it is more dangerous still for men to converse with women of that character; as they are generally more insinuating than men, and have far greater power of persuasion; particularly if they are agreeable in their persons, or pleasing in their conversation. You must be more than man if you can converse with such and not suffer any loss.¹³

Extending the argument concerning friendship between godly men and ungodly women, Wesley prohibits the godly from marrying the ungodly. Indeed, Wesley is appalled by the very idea of such a relationship, saying,

Above all we should tremble at the very thought of entering into a marriage covenant . . . with any person who does not love, or at least, fear God. This is the most horrid folly, the most deplorable madness . . . as it implies every sort of connection with the ungodly which a Christian is bound in conscience to avoid.¹⁴

Fourth, as much as Wesley was troubled by the thought of friendship or especially marriage between godly men and ungodly women, he was equally alarmed by the idea that Methodists would acquire material wealth and, in the wake of this, form friendships with the ungodly. For example, he says that “many of those called Methodists . . . are sick, spiritually sick, and many sleep who were once thoroughly awakened.” The reason for spiritual sickness among the Methodists was plain enough for Wesley. He says, “But it is easily accounted for if we observe that *as they increased in goods they increased in ‘friendship with the world’ . . . [and] in the same proportion as they increased in this, the life of God in their soul decreased.*”¹⁵

Wesley’s concern about the effects of wealth on the Methodists ran so deep that he urged them to sever immediately any friendships with per-

¹³Ibid., 150.

¹⁴Sermon 80: “On Friendship with the World,” 12 (*Works*, III: 132). Also see Sermon 81 (*Works*, III: 146).

¹⁵Ibid., 129 (emphasis added).

sons who were attached to symbols of wealth. For example, in a sermon entitled "On Dress," he remarks:

But are there not some among you that did once renounce this conformity to the world, and dress in every point neat and plain, suitable to your profession? . . . Why did you turn back from the good way? Did you contract an acquaintance, *perhaps a friendship*, with some that were still fond of dress? . . . It is one sin to *contract a friendship* with any that know not God. . . . And this led you back into another, into that conformity to the world from which ye had clean escaped. . . . But what are you to do now? . . . Now, today, before the heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, *cut off at one stroke that sinful friendship with the ungodly*, and that sinful conformity to the world!¹⁶

A major problem stemming from friendships with persons attached to the symbols of wealth was the effect that these relationships could have on Methodist attitudes toward the poor. There is, for example, one fascinating exchange in which Wesley counsels a member of the society who, having some genteel sensibilities, is concerned that being a Methodist requires befriending the poor. In his response, an older and wiser Wesley exhibits pastoral sensitivity and understanding, first sympathizing with the member's concerns and then encouraging the member to care for the poor even if she can not bring herself to befriend the poor.¹⁷ Wesley says,

What I advise you to is, *not to contract a friendship, or even acquaintance*, with poor, inelegant, uneducated persons; but frequently, nay, constantly, to visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless, in their affliction; and this, although they should have nothing to recommend them, but that they are bought with the blood of Christ. It is true, this is not pleasing to flesh and blood. There are a thousand circumstances usually attending it which shock the delicacy of our nature, or rather

¹⁶Sermon 88: "On Dress," 25 (*Works*, III: 259), emphasis added. Another example along these lines is Wesley's advice against desiring to see and to be seen at horse races. See Sermon 143: "Public Diversions Denounced," IV.4 (*Works*, IV: 326).

¹⁷I use the feminine pronoun because, in a private email dated January 23, 2006, Randy Maddox indicated that he believed the member to be Miss J. C. March.

of our education. But yet the blessing which follows this labour of love will more than balance the cost.¹⁸

Fifth, Wesley urged the Methodists to limit their interaction with Methodists who had once again taken up ungodly practices. For example, if a Methodist had returned to the practice of evil-speaking, then the Methodists were to follow the familiar biblical steps, confronting the person, reporting the offence to the elders, and the like. If these things were done to no avail, then they still owed the person “courtesy, and as occasion offers all the offices of humanity,” but they were to “have no friendship, no familiarity with him; no other intercourse than with an open hearth.”¹⁹

The foregoing examples demonstrate Wesley’s concern to limit the Methodists’ interaction with the ungodly in at least five ways. They also reflect the two-fold reason behind Wesley’s concern. On the one hand, Wesley maintained that friendship with the ungodly “is a sin in itself” according to the scriptures. On the other hand, he maintained that such friendships are “attended with most dreadful consequences.”²⁰ Before moving on to the positive aspects of Wesley’s understanding of friendship, we should take a moment further to examine this two-fold rationale.

Concerning the claim that friendship with the ungodly “is a sin in itself,” Wesley maintained that it was not just any sin, but “a sin of a most heinous nature, as not only implying ignorance of God, and forgetfulness of him . . . but positive ‘enmity against God.’”²¹ Wesley’s deepest concern, however, had to do with the spiritual consequences of friendship with the ungodly. Thus, he produced an entire catalogue of these consequences, including (1) the gradual abatement of “their abhorrence of sin in general,” (2) the laying them open to the “sins of omission,” (3) the lessening of “exactness in prayer, in family duty, in fasting, in attending public service, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper,” (4) the giving themselves over to “uncharitable conversation,” (5) the joining in “backbiting, talebearing, and evil-speaking,” (6) such frequent grieving of the Holy Spirit of God “that he [sic] no longer reproves them for it,” (7) the corrup-

¹⁸ Jackson, *Works*, 12: 302. The letter is dated February 26, 1776.

¹⁹ Sermon 49: “The Cure of Evil-Speaking” III.3 (*Works*, II: 260).

²⁰ Sermon 80: “On Friendship with the World,” 12 (*Works*, III: 132).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133. Cf. James 4:4. Wesley refers to the same verse in Sermon 18: “The Marks of the New Birth,” IV.4-5 (*Works*, I: 429-430).

tion of the heart, (8) the creation and increase of "all that pride and self-sufficiency, all that fretfulness and resentment," (9) the gentle leading into "self-indulgence, and unwillingness to deny themselves; into unreadiness to bear or take up any cross," and (10) the drawing them back into "foolish and hurtful desires, into the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life till they are swallowed up in them."²²

Having catalogued the devastating spiritual effects of friendship with the ungodly, Wesley went on to warn the Methodists of the surreptitious nature of these effects. In two passages well-worth quoting at length, he says:

It is probable that it will not immediately have any apparent visible ill consequences. It is hardly to be expected that it will immediately lead us into any outward sin. Perhaps it may not presently occasion our neglect of any outward duty. It will first sap the foundations of our religion; it will by little and little damp our zeal for God; it will gently cool that fervency of spirit which attended our first love. If they do not openly oppose anything we say or do, yet their very spirit will by insensible degrees affect our spirit, and transfuse into it the same lukewarmness and indifference toward God and the things of God. . . . By the same degree, all needless intercourse with unholy men . . . will dim the eyes of the soul, whereby we see him [sic] that is invisible, and weaken our confidence in him. It will gradually abate our "taste of the powers of the world to come," and deaden that hope which made us "sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus."²³

Elsewhere, he remarks,

. . . we shall surely *slide into conformity* to the world, to their maxims, spirit, and customs. For not only their words, harmless as they seem, do eat as doth a canker, but their breath is infectious; their spirit *imperceptibly influences* our spirit. It steals "like water into our bowels, and like oil into our bones."²⁴

²²Ibid., 133-34.

²³Sermon 81: "In What Sense We are to Leave the World," 7-11 and 15-18 (*Works*, III: 146-47; 149-50).

²⁴Sermon 68: "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," 18 (*Works*, II: 562), emphasis added. Cf. Ps. 109:18. Elsewhere, Wesley says of the ungodly, "And their example steals upon us we know not how, so that we insensibly slide into the imitation of it." See Sermon 49: "The Cure of Evil-Speaking," 3 (*Works*, II: 253).

We have seen that Wesley encouraged the Methodists to love all persons, but that he also strictly forbade them to befriend all persons. If Wesley viewed the whole world as his parish, he clearly did not regard all of its inhabitants as friends. The Methodists were studiously to avoid befriending persons who neither feared nor desired God.

Who, then, did Wesley regard as his friends? With whom did he think the Methodists ought to form friendships, and did he place any limitations on these friendships? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Wesley on the Limits of Christian Friendship

If Wesley was careful to identify the persons whom the Methodists were to avoid befriending, then he was equally careful to identify which persons the Methodists ought to befriend. The Methodists were to befriend only persons who “truly loved or feared God.”²⁵ Wesley continues,

Narrowly observe which of those that fall in your way are like minded with yourself. Who among them have you reason to believe fears God and works righteousness? Set them down as worthy of your acquaintance; gladly and freely converse with them at all opportunities. As to those who do not answer that character, gently and quietly let them drop.²⁶

For Wesley, loving *as friends* persons who fear God and work righteousness is one of the marks of a catholic spirit. He says,

If then we take this word in the strictest sense, *a man of a catholic spirit is one who . . . loves as friends*, as brethren in the Lord, as members of Christ and children of God, as joint partakers now of the present kingdom of God, and fellow-heirs of his eternal Kingdom, all of whatever opinion or worship or congregation who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; who love God and man; who, rejoicing to please and fearing to offend God, are careful to abstain from evil and zealous of good works.²⁷

Elsewhere, Wesley qualifies his definition of *catholic love* to account for friendship as a unique, if not higher, form of love. He says, “[C]atholic

²⁵Sermon 81: “In What Sense We are to Leave the World” 23 (*Works*, III: 153).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 24 (*Works* III: 153).

²⁷Sermon 39: “Catholic Spirit” III.4-6 (*Works* II: 94-5), emphasis added.

love . . . is that sincere and tender affection which is due to all those who, we have reason to believe, are children of God by faith; in other words, all those in every persuasion who 'fear God and work righteousness.'²⁸ Similarly, in a letter written June 17, 1774, Wesley comments, "Friendship is one species of love; and is, in its proper sense, a disinterested reciprocal love between two persons."²⁹ Wesley also believed that persons who fear God are the only ones truly capable of friendship. Thus, he says:

Wicked persons are, it seems, incapable of friendship. . . . I apprehend wicked men, under whatever dispensation, to be absolutely incapable of true friendship. By wicked men, I mean, either men openly profane, or men void of justice, mercy, and truth. There may be a shadow of friendship between those, whether of the same, or of different sexes. But surely the substance is wanting: In all my experience, I have found no exception to this rule.³⁰

At this stage, it is worth pausing to note that one of the great debates concerning the nature of Christian love and Christian friendship has to do with whether or not Christian friendship or love should be preferential. Wesley's judgment on this matter was unequivocal. For example, he says, "As you have time, do good unto all men, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith."³¹ Thus any attempt to compare Wesley's views on Christian friendship with the views of other representative figures in the Christian tradition will have to account for this preferential dimension in Wesley's understanding.

Given Wesley's belief that Christians should only befriend persons who, like themselves, fear God and work righteousness, it is not surprising that Wesley viewed service to God and the pursuit of holiness as the primary, if not sole *purpose* of friendship. In one place, for example, Wesley candidly admits that he was himself interested in having friends only to the extent that they could help him on his "way to heaven."³² This sug-

²⁸Sermon 53: "On the Death of George Whitefield," III.7 (*Works*, II: 344), emphasis original. Cf. Ps. 15:2.

²⁹Jackson, *Works*, 12: 295. The letter is dated June 17, 1774.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 295-296.

³¹Sermon 66: "The Signs of the Times," 13 (*Works*, II: 533). Cf. Gal. 5:10.

³²Sermon 81: "In What Sense We are to Leave the World," 23 (*Works*, III: 153).

gests that, for him, the practice of friendship was to be understood principally, perhaps even exclusively, *in soteriological terms*. Friendship was not to be viewed as an end unto itself. Rather, like scripture, worship, baptism, and Eucharist, Wesley appears to have viewed friendship as a means of grace by which persons come to know and to love God more deeply.

To the degree that Wesley viewed friendship as a means of grace, he also thought that friendship could impede the right appropriation of other means of grace. Thus, Wesley warned the Methodists not to use the means of grace to avoid the loss of friends:

If then any man from the same motive (*viz.* to avoid punishment, *to avoid the loss of friends*, or his gain, or his reputation) should not only abstain from doing evil but also do ever so much good—yea, and *use all the means of grace*—yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even “almost a Christian.”³³

Elsewhere, Wesley suggests that, in coming truly to fear and to serve God, the Methodists are likely to experience a frequent loss not only of “kinsfolk,” but of “the friends that were as their own soul.”³⁴ Such losses were, from Wesley’s viewpoint, a mixed blessing. On the one hand, persons who would rather lose their friends than “give up faith and a good conscience” could rest assured that their faith was sincere.³⁵ On the other hand, as we will see, Wesley knew that the loss of friends—especially the loss of friends to death—could be deeply troubling.

Why did Wesley think that the Methodists should anticipate the loss of friends? Put simply, the purpose of Christian friendship, *i.e.*, the strengthening of one another’s capacity for serving God, makes for a very rigorous and demanding view of the duties of Christian friendship. This is a direct reflection of Wesley’s view that the means of grace are, in part, provisions for accountability and communal discipline.³⁶ Consider the

³³Sermon 2: “The Almost Christian,” I.9 (*Works*, I: 136), emphasis added. Also see Sermon 21: “Sermon on the Mount, I” II.2 (*Works*, I: 483).

³⁴Sermon 23: “Sermon on the Mount III,” III.6 (*Works*, I: 525). For more on the expectation that living a godly life will cause one to lose friends, see Sermon 52: “The Reformation of Manners,” V.7 (*Works*, II: 321-22).

³⁵Sermon 91: “On Charity,” II.5 (*Works*, III: 299-300).

³⁶For this aspect of Wesley’s understanding of the means of grace, see Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 211.

following two examples of this from Wesley's letters and journals. First, in a letter to Mr. John Smith dated September 28, 1745, Wesley writes,

I am exceedingly obliged by the pains you have taken to point out to me what you think to be mistakes. It is a truly Christian attempt, an act of brotherly love, which I pray God to repay sevenfold into your bosom. Methinks I can scarce look upon such a person, on one who is "a contender for truth and not for victory," whatever opinion he may entertain of me, as an adversary at all. *For what is friendship, if I am to account him my enemy who endeavours to open my eyes, or to amend my heart?*³⁷

Second, Wesley recalls in his journal a note that he sent to Mr. Causton, suggesting that the "painful offices" are *the distinguishing mark* of sincerity in friendship. The contents of the note reveal exactly what Wesley meant by "painful offices."

If the sincerity of friendship is best to be known from the painful offices, then there could not be a stronger proof of mine than that I gave you on Sunday, except this which I am going to give you now, and which you may perhaps equally misinterpret. . . . Would you know what I dislike in your past or present behaviour? You have always heard my thoughts as freely as you asked them. Nay, much more freely. You know it well. And so you shall do, as long as I can speak or write. . . . In your present behaviour I dislike: (1) Your neglect of half the Public Service, which no man living can oblige you to; (2) Your neglect of fasting, which you once knew to be a help to the mind, without any prejudice to the body; (3) Your neglect of almost half the opportunities of communicating which you have lately had.³⁸

Finally, with regard to the loss of friends, two additional comments are revealing. On the one hand, Wesley exhorts the Methodists to tell God in prayer that they are willing to lose their friends so long as they can be "born of the Spirit."³⁹ On the other hand, Wesley reminds the Methodists that friends are not the source of true happiness, saying,

³⁷Jackson, *Works*, 12: 57 (emphasis added).

³⁸*Works*, 18: 523-24 (emphasis added). This is from the Manuscript Georgia Journal, March 7, 1735/6 – Dec. 16, 1737.

³⁹Sermon 45: "The New Birth," IV.4 (*Works*, II: 201).

When I had lived a few years longer . . . having plenty of all things, in the midst of sensible and amiable friends who loved me, and I loved them; and being in the way of life which of all others suited my inclinations; still I was not happy.⁴⁰

For Wesley, knowing and loving God is both the *source* of true happiness and the *purpose* of Christian friendship. The problem with friendship is that persons are prone to forget its purpose, namely, the strengthening of one another's desire and capacity to love and to serve God. When this happens, Wesley clearly regarded friendship with the godly as no less spiritually dangerous than friendship with the ungodly. As a result, he sought to place limits not only on who the Methodists were to befriend, but also on how far they should pursue their friendships even with those who fear and love God. For Wesley, attachment to the symbols of wealth was clearly a sin, but so was attachment to friends.

A chief indicator that Christian friends had become inappropriately attached to one another was, for Wesley, excessive mourning over the death of a friend. Wesley's concern over this issue was sufficiently deep that he wrote a sermon entitled "On Mourning for the Dead." There, Wesley commented that friendship could be so powerful that "human nature, on this side of the grave, knows no closer, no softer, no stronger tie." Having acknowledged how strong the bonds of friendship could be, he goes on to warn the Methodists not to grieve too long when friends pass away, saying, "At the tearing asunder these sacred bonds, well may we allow without blame some parting pangs—but the difficulty is to put as speedy a period to them as religion and reason command us."⁴¹

To be sure, one of the reasons that Wesley warns against excessive mourning is eschatological in nature. To mourn the death of a friend for too long is to risk "being overcome by . . . the gloomy side of this prospect," i.e., with the pain involved with aging and with dying. By contrast, Wesley thought that, upon the death of a friend, Christians should "*immediately* recur to the bright side of it, and reflect with cheerfulness and gratitude that our time passeth away like a shadow."⁴² Wesley clearly believed that Christians would be united with one another in heaven. We know this partly by inference from Wesley's views on friendship in hell,

⁴⁰Sermon 77: "Spiritual Worship," III.2 (*Works*, III: 98).

⁴¹Sermon 136: "On Mourning for the Dead," 17 (*Works*, IV: 242).

⁴²*Ibid.*, 243.

about which he says, “[Persons] are torn away from their nearest and dearest relations, their wives, husbands, parents, children, and (what in some cases will be worse than all this) the friend which was as their own soul. . . . There is no friendship in hell.”⁴³

While Wesley’s eschatological commitments were behind some of his warnings about excessive mourning for the dead, they were not the source of his deepest concern. On the contrary, Wesley’s warnings were motivated primarily by a conviction that excessive mourning for the dead indicated that Christians had come to love their friends more than they ought. For example, in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley says:

We scarce conceive how easy it is to rob God of his due, in our friendship with the most virtuous persons, until they are torn from us by death. But if this loss produce lasting sorrow, that is a clear proof that we had before two treasures, between which we divided our heart.⁴⁴

In a similar move elsewhere, Wesley comments on the potential for Christians to form idolatrous relationships with their friends. After a lengthy discussion of an entire range of potential idols, he says:

But suppose we were guarded against all these [e.g., objects of sense and objects of the imagination], *are there not other idols which we have need to be apprehensive of; and idols therefore more dangerous, because we suspect no danger from them? For is there any danger to be feared from our friends and relations? . . . Ought we not to bear a very tender affection to them? Ought we not to love them only less than God? . . . All this is unquestionably true. And this very thing makes the difficulty. Who is sufficient for this, to go far enough herein, and no farther? To love them enough, and not too much? Who can love a child, a wife, a friend well enough without loving the creature more than the Creator?*⁴⁵

⁴³Sermon 73: “Of Hell,” I.2 (*Works*, III: 34).

⁴⁴John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley from the Year 1725 to the Year 1777* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 25.38.6 (p. 110).

⁴⁵Sermon 120: “The Unity of the Divine Being” 13 (*Works*, IV: 65-6), emphasis added.

The parallel between this remark about the potentially dangerous effects of Christian friendship and Wesley's remarks about the almost certainly dangerous effects of friendship of the ungodly is difficult to miss. Like the effects of friendship with the ungodly, Wesley was keen to observe the surreptitious nature of the effects of Christian friendships. If they were not vigilant, the Methodists could easily become, by imperceptible degrees, too attached to their friends. This leaves us with the following question: By what means could the Methodists avoid loving their friends "too much?" For Wesley, the fear of God alone was simply not sufficient to prevent persons from going too far in their love for one another. Thus, he comments, "Nor indeed is every one that fears God capable of friendship. It requires a peculiar turn of mind, without which it can have no being."⁴⁶

Of course, this only raises a further question. How does one come by the "peculiar turn of mind" necessary for the exercise of Christian friendship? In a remark concerning the desire for friendship, Wesley puts the matter plainly, saying, "I think it cannot be proved that such a desire is anywhere forbidden in Scripture. *But it requires a very strong influence of the Holy Spirit to prevent its running into excess.*" Only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, says Wesley, can Christians "give up everything" to their friends, "except a good conscience toward God."⁴⁷

Wesley's Views on Friendship: Sources

Before concluding with some critical questions, it is appropriate to say a word about possible sources for Wesley's views on friendship. Questions related to Wesley's sources are notoriously difficult to answer conclusively. Wesley read widely, including both ancient and contemporary materials, but he often did not take the time to indicate which sources he had in mind at any given moment. Thus, there is a degree of educated guesswork involved in any attempt to identify the sources upon which Wesley was dependent for his views on a particular topic. The case is no different when we take up possible sources for his views on friendship. Nonetheless, it is possible to see striking family resemblances between what Wesley has to say about friendship and what others had said before him.

⁴⁶Jackson, *Works*, 12: 295. This letter was written on June 17, 1774.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

A characteristic feature of recent Wesley studies is the tendency to look for classical and patristic sources for Wesley's thought. Unfortunately, in the rush to demonstrate Wesley's dependency on, say, Eastern patristic sources, a more basic dependency is often overlooked, namely, his dependency upon scripture.⁴⁸ Wesley's views on friendship, for example, are deeply shaped by his reading of the New Testament, most notably James, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and 1 & 2 Timothy. Any extended analysis of the sources for Wesley's views on friendship will need to begin with a close examination of Wesley's reading of scriptural texts on the topic.

In addition to scripture, one can observe interesting family resemblances between Wesley's views on friendship and the views of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca. For example, in the *Lysis*, Plato has Socrates advise Hippothales to demonstrate his love for Lysis by pointing out Lysis' faults and by calling him to a greater desire for the Good.⁴⁹ Later, Plato reminds his readers that the source and aim of friendship is the *proton philon*, i.e., the thing for the love of which "we are in the first instance friends," namely, the Good.⁵⁰ This aspect of Plato's views on friendship resembles Wesley's argument that the source and aim of Christian friendship is love for God and the pursuit of heaven.

If Wesley's views concerning the source and aims of friendship resemble Plato's, then there is an even stronger resemblance between Wesley's views and the views of the Stoics, most notably the views of Cicero and Seneca. For example, Cicero notes approvingly Zeno's view that friendships are a means to the good.⁵¹ Also, like Wesley after him, Cicero believes strongly that only the wise (Wesley's "Godly") are capable of friendship.⁵² Similarly, Seneca affirms the Stoic wisdom saying, "Only the wise man is a friend," interpreting it to mean that only wise

⁴⁸Richard P. Heitzenrater is right to issue a cautionary note concerning the extent of Wesley's knowledge of or dependence upon Eastern patristic sources. See his "John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, edited by S. T. Kimbrough (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 25-32.

⁴⁹*Lysis*, 210e. For an extended discussion of Plato's views, see A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰*Lysis*, 219c-d.

⁵¹Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.16.55.

⁵²Cicero, *De Laelius*, 5.18.

persons are capable of friendship.⁵³ Also like Wesley, Seneca maintains that wise persons do not have friends for personal benefit, but for mutual help and support in their pursuit of the good.⁵⁴ Finally, there are strong resemblances between Cicero's and Wesley's reflections on the limits of friendship. Thus, like Wesley, Cicero argues that one must be careful in choosing friends, avoiding at all costs those who are not willing to pursue the benefits of "frank speech."⁵⁵

Despite the family resemblances between Wesley's views on friendship and the views of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca, it is not certain that Wesley was relying directly on these ancient sources for his views. The reason for this is obvious. Wesley was the inheritor of a renaissance tradition in recent English philosophical and theological literature. This tradition included numerous original works by English authors on friendship.⁵⁶ Also available were numerous English translations of both classical and recent original works by French authors.⁵⁷ All of these works drew deeply from classical sources, including the works of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca. Thus, it is entirely possible that the influence of classical authors on Wesley's thinking was both direct (stemming from his readings as a student at Oxford), and indirect (based on recent secondary works steeped in the classical tradition).

Wesley's Views on Friendship: Questions

For many persons today, Wesley's views on friendship will appear extreme, if not offensive. At a minimum, his views raise an entire host of questions. Does Wesley really mean that Methodists, if not all Christians, ought to avoid being friends with persons who do not fear or love God as much as they do? Does he mean to include immediate family members who do not fear or love God? Further, who or what sets the standard for

⁵³Seneca, *Epistle*, 81.12.

⁵⁴Seneca, *Epistle*, 9.

⁵⁵See *De Laelius*, 16.

⁵⁶Especially noteworthy are the following three works: Francis Bacon's essay "Of Friendship" published in his *Essays*; Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* (1655); and Jeremy Taylor's *The Measures and Offices of Friendship* (1662).

⁵⁷For example, Montaigne's essay "Of Friendship" was translated into English in 1603, and Monsieur de Sacy's French treatise, *An Essay on Friendship*, was translated into English in 1704.

how much fear or love for God is needed before someone is a candidate for Christian friendship? How is such fear or love to be observed? Are the criteria purely moral in nature, or are they psychological and theological? Is the preferential aspect of Wesley's view acceptable? Can one really maintain the distinction between loving all persons equally and "loving as friends" those in the household of faith? What do we do with those persons who testify that they came to faith because of a long-term relationship with a Christian friend? Do their testimonies not suggest that Christians have a vested interest in maintaining friendships with the ungodly? All of these questions are legitimate, and they will surely need to be dealt with in any attempt to appropriate Wesley's views on friendship today. However, I want to conclude by lifting up one aspect of Wesley's views. Wesley's remarks both on friendship with the ungodly and on Christian friendships reveal something interesting about his understanding of the nature and consequences of sin in the Christian life. Reading these remarks, one gets the impression that Wesley saw the Christian life as especially vulnerable, not to things blatantly sinful (e.g., murder, rape, child pornography, and the like), but to precisely those things that, on the surface, appear most beneficial. Wesley seems to think that activities like evangelism, lending a helping hand to ungodly neighbors, or even friendships with fellow Christians are precisely the sort of things that, if not carefully monitored, can result in the diminishment of our love for God. For Wesley, sin preys on things like friendship surreptitiously to undermine our salvation. If Wesley is right about this, then he is surely right to say that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is needed to prevent sin from hijacking our best efforts to spread the Gospel, to do good to others, to seek God, and the like. The appeal to the Holy Spirit, however, raises some very interesting questions. Does Wesley's understanding of sin get in the way of his ability to trust the same Holy Spirit to which he appeals for help? Are Wesley's extraordinary efforts to provide meticulous rules and guidelines to keep the Methodists from being overtaken by sin a form of wise counsel or of spiritual paranoia? In placing limits on friendship, does Wesley unwittingly place limits on the generosity, creativity, and ingenuity of the Holy Spirit?

PAUL AND HIS FRIENDS WITHIN THE GRECO-ROMAN CONTEXT

by

George Lyons and William H. Malas, Jr.

One could reasonably ask, Why a paper on Paul and friendship? A quick search of his letters shows that Paul never used the specific terms “friend” (*philos*) or “friendship” (*philia*) to express his Christian message, and he seldom used words from the *phil*-cognate group.¹ Yet, friendship language abounds if we attune ourselves to the wider range of concepts associated with Greco-Roman views on the subject. These pages attempt to so attune us by identifying what those ancient concepts of friendship are and highlighting Paul’s use of them in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians. The choice of these letters demonstrates Paul’s extensive use of this language in what are arguably his earliest and latest authentic letters. The

†All translations so marked (†) are the authors’ own translation of the original language.

¹Within the Pauline corpus appear the words: *philadelphia* (“sibling love”†) in Rom. 12:10 and 1 Thess. 4:9; *philostorgos* (“affectionate love”†) in Rom. 12:10; *philoxenia* (“hospitality” = “love of strangers”†) in Rom. 12:13 and Tit. 1:8; *philotimeomai* (“I aspire”†) in Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 5:9; and 1 Thess. 4:11 (synonymous with *agapē*); *philēma* (“kiss”) in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; and 1 Thess. 5:26; *philoneikos* (“contentious”†) in 1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Tim. 3:2; *phileō* in 1 Cor. 16:22 and Tit. 3:15; *philargyria* (“love of money”) in 1 Tim. 6:10 and 2 Tim. 3:2; *philautos* (“self-love”†) in 2 Tim. 3:2, 4; *philēdonos* (“love of pleasure”); *philotheos* (“love of God”) in 2 Tim. 3:4; *philagathos* (“love of good” †) in Tit. 1:8; *philandros* (“love of husband”†) in Tit. 2:4; *philoteknos* (“love of child”†) in Tit. 2:4; *philanthrōpia* in (“love for humanity”†) in Tit. 3:4.

end result of this analysis will be a better understanding of the bond of friendship that Paul forms with and within his Christian communities.

Early Greek Discussion of Friendship

Early Greek discussion of friendship² began with Homer.³ His characters discuss and exemplify ideals of friendship like “oneness of mind” and “frankness of speech” that become part of the classic discussion of the characteristics of true friends. In addition, his characters illustrate the pitfalls of friendship⁴ and the difficulty of distinguishing true and false friends.

Aristotle provided the most extensive treatment of friendship before the Greco-Roman period.⁵ His systematic assessment builds on the culturally shared convictions of post-Homeric authors about this relationship.⁶ Foundational to all friendships was loyalty—faithfulness. To avoid choosing fickle friends, one needed to be selective and slow. True friends emerged only after long testing. Consequently, true friends were precious and few.

²The most extensive survey of friendship in the ancient world is David Konstan’s *Friendship in the Classical World*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). A quick summary that relies on Konstan’s work is found in John T. Fitzgerald’s “Paul and Friendship,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, edited by J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2003), 320–31. This survey derives primarily from Fitzgerald’s essay.

³In fact, Homer’s account of the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus becomes part of the classical canon of friends. The Greek canon of those having a “yoke of friendship” (*zeugos philias*) includes: Achilles and Patroclus, Theseus and Peirithous, Orestes and Pylades, Phintias and Damon, and Epaminondas and Pelopidas (e.g., those listed in Plutarch’s “On Having Many Friends,” 93e). For Jews, David and Jonathan have similar status (Josephus, *A. J.* 6.206, 225, 228, 236, 239, 276; 7.111). See Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 321.

⁴Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 321–22 identifies three problems regarding friendship that were to become the focus of later writings that codify the nature of Greek friendship. The first is the abuse of friendship. The second is the death of a friend. And finally, delicate problems arise when a friendship dissolves and when these friends attempt to reconcile. Homer’s depiction of the relationship between Agammemnon and Achilles are the earliest portrayal of these dynamics.

⁵The most extensive treatments on friendship are found in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Eudemian Ethics*. Additional reflection is found in the *Magna Moralia*, which was likely written after Aristotle’s death.

Three characteristics of friendship were most important to Aristotle. Of primary importance was *koinōnia*, “that is, shared activity and purpose”⁷—“partnership” or “fellowship” in the New Testament. Partnership creates affection as true friends find more activities in which they participate together and share a common life.

Second, Aristotle identified three types of friendship. The first was grounded in utility; the second in pleasure; the third in shared virtue.⁸ No matter what the basis for the relationship was, friendship always sprang from “reciprocity”—here “equality.” Thus, to be friends, each participant was to return in kind what the other had given to the relationship. In essence, Aristotle insisted that “friends’ goods are common property.”

Third, of the three forms of friendship, Aristotle identified those based on “mutual adoration of character”⁹ as the highest. That is, “the perfect form of friendship is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue.”¹⁰ Such friendships result in the most lasting friends. They fail only when one friend calls into question another’s commitment to the virtues they supposedly shared in common.¹¹

Friendship in the Greco-Roman Period

During the Greco-Roman period, the social and economic dynamics between individuals changed. Instead of city-states in which free men of

⁶Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 322–23.

⁷Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 326.

⁸Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 326.

⁹Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 326.

¹⁰Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. & trans. by H. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 8.3.6.

¹¹Besides what friends shared, Aristotle noted some general characteristics of friendship that are taken up by later writers. Friends were “altruistic rather than egoistic.” They sought “the good of the friend for the friends’ sake and act[ed] in order to promote the good.” They did not wrong each other; rather they corrected one another. Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 327 summarizes the remaining characteristics with these words:

Friends desire the same things, and chief among these is the desire to spend time with each other. As a result of living together, their relationship is marked by concord (... *homonoia*), equality (... *isotēs*), intimacy (... *synētheia*), and confident trust in one another. Those who are friends are consequently “one soul” (... *mia psychē*), sharing not only material possessions but also joys and sorrows. In short, a friend is one’s *alter ego*, “another self” or “second self,” on whose behalf one is willing even to die.

basically equal social and economic status bonded together as friends in the common cause of a free democracy, Greco-Roman culture was dominated by patron-client relationships. By their very nature, these relationships involved people who were not equal socially, economically, or politically. Though Aristotle would have been reluctant to call such “unequal” relationships friendships, writers of the Greco-Roman period do.¹² The basis for friendships during this era consisted in the ideals and values friends shared, even if they were unequal in the resources they could commit to their common vision.

The possibility of unequal friendships within Greco-Roman culture exasperated a problem identified first by Homer: How was one to tell a true friend from a false one? False friends abounded during the period as clients attempted to benefit from their patrons by posing as friends. Several authors, in particular Plutarch’s *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, concluded that true “friends” were distinguished by their willingness to engage in “frank speech” (*parrēsia*), in contrast to false friends who were unwilling to be completely forthright.

We can now turn to three of the best known writings on friendship from antiquity.¹³ They are Cicero’s “On Friendship,” Plutarch’s “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend,”¹⁴ and Lucian of Samosata’s “Toxaris, or Friendship.”¹⁵ These writings help clarify how Paul utilized friendship language in his letters. These three were near-contemporaries of Paul. Cicero lived during the early first century BC; Plutarch, during the late first and early second century AD; Lucian, during the second century AD. Because these authors share many of the same cultural convictions about friendship, rather than summarize each, we select six terms/concepts that appear prominently in all three as salient characteristics of friendship: unity (*homoios*); partnership (*koinōnia*); equality (*isotēs*); moral excellence (*aretē*); frankness (*parrēsia*); and loyalty (*pistis*). The English terms

¹²The most important writing of friendship in this period is Cicero’s *On Friendship* (*De amicitia*).

¹³Gustav Stählin, “*phileō, ktl.*” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [subsequently identified as *TDNT*], ed. by Gerhard Friedrich; ed. and trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9:151.

¹⁴With some glances to Plutarch’s “On Having Many Friends” in *Plutarch’s Moralia II*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928 [1971 reprint]), 43-69.

¹⁵Stählin, “*phileō, ktl.*” 9:151.

and the Greek terms they gloss overlap considerably in meaning, and hardly exhaust the Greco-Roman terminology of friendship. For our purposes, what these concepts do form is a “linkage group”—“a nexus of ideas that interrelate within the overarching theme of ‘friendship.’”¹⁶

1. Unity. Cicero¹⁷ insisted that “friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection” (§20). Thus, “he who looks upon a true friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself” (§23; cf. §80). “Be a good man yourself and then . . . seek another like yourself” (§82; cf. §50). Similarly, Paul defined genuine love as requiring dear friends [*philostorgoi* . . . *philadelphia*] to share a mutual hatred of evil and commitment to the good (Rom. 12:9-10).

Plutarch¹⁸ believed: “That which most especially cements a friendship begun is likeness [*homoiotēs*] of pursuits and characters [*ēthōn*”¹⁹ (§51B)—“the same habits [*ethē*]²⁰ and traits [*ēthē*] . . . and . . . the same pursuits, activities, and avocations” (§51E). Cicero concluded that “the effect of friendship is to make . . . one soul out of many” (§92).

Among Lucian’s²¹ stories of true friendship, one recounts Macentes’ daring heroism in behalf of his friend Arsacomus. When Arsacomus tried to thank him, Macentes responded (§53):

¹⁶Fitzgerald, “Paul and Friendship,” 330. Similar language is found in Luke Timothy Johnson, “Making Connections: The Material Expressions of Friendship in the NT,” *Interpretation* 58 (April 2004), 160. Johnson identifies this grouping of concepts as a “topos”—“a loose collection of associated thoughts clustered around a specific theme or ‘topic.’”

¹⁷Cicero, “De Amicitia” in *De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, vol. 20, trans. by William Armistead Falconer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923 [1979 reprint]), 101-211.

¹⁸Plutarch, “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend,” in *Plutarch’s Moralia I*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927 [1969 reprint]), 261-395. In his “On Having Many Friends,” Plutarch writes: “Friendship comes into being through likeness [*homoiotētos*]” (§96D).

¹⁹Paul’s only use of the term *ēthos* (in 1 Cor. 15:33) apparently quotes the fourth-century BC poet Menander: “Bad company ruins good morals” (NRSV).

²⁰Paul never uses the term *ethos*, which appears ten times in Luke-Acts and once in John and Hebrews.

²¹Lucian, “Toxaris, or Friendship,” in *Lucian*, trans. by A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936 [1972 reprint]), 5:101-207.

Stop making me a different person from yourself! To express gratitude to me for what I have done in this is just as if my left hand should be grateful to my right for ministering to it when it had been wounded and taking care of it fondly while it was weak. So with us—it would be ridiculous if, after having fused ourselves together long ago and united, as far as we could, into a single person, we should continue to think it a great thing if this or that part of us has done something useful in behalf of the whole body; for it was working in its own behalf as a part of the whole organism, to which the good was being done.

2. Partnership. Unlike friends, flatterers, Plutarch claims, are “by nature jealous.” True friends find “it most pleasant to love and be loved along with others.” They are untroubled that their friends have other friends. Because a true friend is convinced that “‘friends own everything in common [*koina*],’ he thinks that no possession ought to be held so much in common [*koinon*] as friends” (§65AB). Flatterers see themselves as competitors who must exclude their friends’ other friends.²²

Lucian stresses commonality and faithfulness (*koinōnian kai to piston*—§7) as the supreme marks of true friendship, offering numerous anecdotes of how “friends should share [*koinōnein*] all their fortunes” (§6). Friends share equally in the delights and dangers of their friends (§7), vowing not only to “live with one another but die, if need be, for each other” (§37).²³

Cicero noted that such “friendships are very hard to find” (§64). Lucian claimed that one could expect to have no more than three such friends. Many friends weaken friendship because “it has been split up into a multitude of loyalties” (§37). Plutarch reflected these same cultural misgivings in his essay “On Having Many Friends.” He claimed that “a strong mutual friendship with many persons is impossible” (“Many”

²²This helps make sense of Paul’s comment in Gal 4:16-18, in which he contrasts himself and the flattering “troublemakers.”

²³According to Lucian, friends should share [*koinōnein*] “all their fortunes” (§6). Faithful [*piston*] friends are willing to share [*koinōn ēsai*] “a common front [*koinōnian*] amidst all their perils” and “an equal share [*isēs koinōnēsousin*] in all their delights” (§7). There is no greater proof of friendship toward a friend “than that of sharing [*koinōnēsas*] his death” (§20). Cf. Phil. 3:10—“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing [*koinōnian*] of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (NRSV).

§93F; cf. 94F), because few are capable of keeping “up the same participation [*homoiōs koinōnian*]” (“Many” §96D). Paul and the Greco-Roman friendship theorists definitely part company on the possibility of numerous friends. Paul conceived of the church as a society of many friends.

3. Equality. Greco-Roman writers were persuaded that similar values and mutual concern made it possible for friendship to exist even between superiors and inferiors, provided they treated one another as equals [*parem*]. Cicero noted that this required the superior—whether in “virtue, intellect, or fortune”—to enhance “the dignity of all his friends” by being “the source of honour and influence to the other” (§§69-70). “In friendship, those who are superior should lower themselves . . . [and] lift up their inferiors” (§70). Within this cultural context, the Christ-hymn of Philippians must have been heard as encouragement to emulate Christ’s model of true friendship. And this is precisely how Paul introduces it:

Think the same thoughts, have the same love, be of one soul and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but humbly consider others better than yourselves. Do not look out for your own interests, but for the interests of others. Think among yourselves in the same way Christ Jesus did (Phil. 2:2b-5).

Friendship requires, Plutarch observed, that “between true friends there is neither emulation nor envy, but whether their share of success is equal [*ison*] or less, they bear it with moderation and without vexation.”²⁴ Flatterers feign inferiority in everything, except in what is bad (§54C).

4. Moral Excellence. Cicero insists that “Virtue . . . both creates the bond of friendship and preserves it. For in Virtue is complete harmony . . . permanence . . . [and] fidelity” (§100). True “friendship cannot exist except among good men [*bonis*]” (§18). In fact, “without virtue friendship cannot exist at all” (§20), for “virtue knits friendship together” (§48). Thus, true friends would never ask their friends to do wrong (§35; cf. §38). Therefore, “the first law of friendship” is this: “Ask of friends only what is honorable [*honestā*]; do for friends only what is honorable. . .”

²⁴Similarly, Paul urged the Galatians, “Let us not become conceited, or compete with one another, or envy one another” (Gal 5:26).† But he claimed that such friendship was possible only among those who live by and are guided by the Spirit (5:25).

(§44, cf. §40). As a corollary to Cicero's law, Plutarch required true friends to imitate only the best things in their friends (§53C) and to warn friends against dishonorable vices contrary to their better selves (§73B).

5. Frankness. Because friendship thrives only in the soil of virtue, Cicero believed that "friends frequently must be not only advised, but also rebuked" (§89). "It is characteristic of true friendship both to give and to receive advice and . . . to give it with all freedom of speech [*libere*]," but without either "harshness" or "flattery" (§91). "Nothing is . . . a greater bane of friendship than . . . flattery [*adulationem*]" (§91). Friends "dare to give true advice with all frankness [*auctoritas*]" (§44), but also "free from harshness, and . . . insult" (§89).

Finding the proper balance between the two extremes is the entire point of Plutarch's "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend." "Frankness of speech [*parrēsian*] . . . is the language of friendship" (§51C). Although a friend's frankness may call for "stinging words" (§55B), they are intended to serve "as a medicine which restores and preserves health" (§55C-D). But a flatterer's "real desire" is "to praise his victim and to puff him up all the more" (§58B). "The pain [*to lypoun*] which [true frankness] causes is salutary [*sōtērion*]" (§59B).²⁵

According to Plutarch, virtuous friends distinguish "frankness" which is "friendly and noble," from "fault-finding [*memphis*]," which is "selfish and mean" (§66E). Friendship must be purged of "all arrogance [*hyprin*], ridicule [*gelōta*], scoffing [*skōmma*], and scurrility [*bōmolchian*], which are the unwholesome seasoning of free speech [*parrēsias*]" (§67E). Frank speech requires gentleness [*epieikeias*] like that offered by "nurses [*titthai*]" (§69C).²⁶ Those who would speak frankly with their friends must first praise them for what they do right (§73CD). "A kindly [*epieikēs*] friend, a good father, and a teacher, take

²⁵Plutarch expected a person's frankness "to be backed by character [*ēthous*], but this is especially true in the case of those who admonish [*nouthetountōn*] others" (§32E). This may explain why autobiographical reminders frequently serve as the basis for Paul's parenthesis. In Rom. 15:14 Paul explains his confidence in his Roman friends' [*adelphoi*] ability "to admonish one another [*allēlous nouthetein*]" as based on the conviction that they were "full of goodness and all knowledge."

²⁶Plutarch insisted that "He who reviles [*lypēron*] is charged with hurting [*tou loidorountos*], and he who admonishes [*ōphelimon*] is credited with helping [*tou nouthetountos*]" (§30E).

pleasure [*chairei*] in using commendation [*epainō*] rather than blame [*phogō*] for the correction of character” (§73D).²⁷ Paul certainly followed this practice in his letters.

6. Loyalty. Another expectation of true friendship according to Cicero was that “friends, though absent, are at hand: though in need, yet abound; though weak, are strong; . . . though dead, are yet alive” (§23).²⁸ True friendship is based on shared values, not just physical proximity or personal affinity. Thus, Plutarch insisted that, unlike flatterers, true friends “praise us in [our] absence [*apontas*] rather than in our presence [*parontas*]” (§55F). Because true friends are not fickle, Cicero urged choosing only those who “are firm, steadfast and constant” as friends (§62). Friendship is easy in good times. But the true test of friendship comes in hard times.²⁹

Examples of the Theme of Friendship in the Letters of Paul

It is our contention that Paul understood his relationship with his churches and of their mutual relations within the framework of the Greco-Roman conception of friendship. We do not claim that this explains everything Paul believed about the church, but it does help make sense of much of what he says. Time does not permit us to survey all of his letters, so a representative sample must suffice to make our case.

A. Friendship in 1 Thessalonians

1. Loyalty. A central concern of Paul’s earliest letter, 1 Thessalonians, was to rehearse the evidence of the continuing mutual friendship between himself and the Christian church in Thessalonica, despite their forced separation. They were separated in person, but not in heart (2:17;

²⁷Plutarch recommended that friends use gently applied, helpful frankness only in private, in order to avoid the “sophistry [*sophistikōn*]” of seeking “glory [*eneudokimein*] in other men’s faults, and to make a fair show [*kallopizōmenon*] before the spectators [*tous parontos*]”—those who are present (§32).

²⁸Cf. Gal. 4:18—“It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you.”

²⁹This recognition, not hypochondria, probably explains Paul’s frequent lists of the hardships he endured to maintain his friendships with his churches, even when he was unable to visit them in person as he would have preferred (see Gal. 4:18, 20; 1 Thess. 2:17—3:13). There had to be some good reason for friends not to spend time together.

3:10).³⁰ The letter served as a stop-gap measure to overcome the severest test of friendship, physical and temporal separation.³¹

Timothy's return from his mission to Thessalonica, the occasion of the letter, brought Paul the good news that the church they had founded there remained Paul's "loyal friends" (3:6). Paul made a special point of emphasizing their continuing "loyalty" (3:7 and 3:8) despite their afflictions (3:3, 5). And he claims in 3:8, "We live so long as you stand firm in the Lord," emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between him and the Thessalonians. They mutually encouraged one another.³² And the letter concludes with a similar emphasis on their equality. He prays for them and urges them to pray for him (5:23-25).

2. Equality. The two "biographical" sections, 1:5-10 and 2:13-16, which focus on Paul's Thessalonian *mimētai*, "imitators," are nearly identical in length to the autobiographical description of the "model," of Paul in 2:1-12. All this is supportive of Paul's emphasis throughout the letter on the equality, mutuality, and reciprocity of the relationship between him and his converts. The underlying relationship between Paul's description of the Thessalonians' ethos and his ethos is the correlation of imitators—model. Paul was clearly the superior in this friendship, but his selfless ministry among them in their behalf encouraged them to lead lives worthy of the God who called them into his kingdom and glory (2:1-12).³³

3. Unity. Although Paul appealed for imitation in other letters (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9), in 1 Thessalonians (1:6; 2:13) he explicitly affirmed that his converts had already become his

³⁰"True friendship does not change even when the friends are separated" (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia*, Hermenia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 232).

³¹Konstan (*Friendship*, 162-63) provides evidence that the earliest Christian interpreters of Paul's letters—e.g., John Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus—believed they were following Paul in their understanding of the church as a society of friends.

³²Walter Grundmann ("*stētkō, histemi*" in *TDNT*, 7:636) notes that "standing in the Lord has sustaining power and also the power to create fellowship."

³³The explicit vocabulary of partnership—*koinōnia*—is entirely missing in the Thessalonian correspondence. It is visible in all the other letters of the Pauline corpus except Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy.

imitators.³⁴ And his readers had themselves become an example (*typos*) for imitation by other believers (1:7).³⁵ Paul defined his relationship with the Thessalonian church in philopronetic terms, emphasizing their mutual relations and their likeness to one another—their shared values and experiences. Their continued friendship toward him through hard times and their faithfulness to God gave *him* encouragement in the midst of his “distress” and “affliction” (3:7). The intent of these reminders of his friendship toward them in 2:1-12 was to encourage *them* in their endurance of suffering. His parenthesis in chs. 4 and 5 was to encourage them likewise to encourage one another (4:18; 5:11).

4. Moral Excellence. Both Paul and his Thessalonian friends embodied and represented the gospel (2:13), demonstrating the truth of the word of God. The basis for the similarity between Paul and his converts was their imitation of him, the Lord (1:6), and the churches of Judea (2:14). Although the models differed, the imitated ethos was identical—Christlike perseverance in the face of opposition (see 1:6; 2:1-2; 2:14-16). And it was the same activity of God which was responsible for the exemplary ethos of both the Thessalonians and Paul.

5. Frankness. Paul was no flatterer (*kolakeias*, 2:5)³⁶ who used the Thessalonians for his selfish ends (*pleonechias*, 2:5). On the contrary, Paul claimed (in 2:8b), “We were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very selves.” This reaffirmed his genuine friendship (*agapētoi* in 2:8) for the Thessalonians. Although he preached

³⁴See Willis Peter de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: Kok, 1962), 123. Wilhelm Michaelis (“*mimeomai*, *ktl.*” in *TDNT*, 4:659-74) mistakenly (we think) claims that their imitation consisted only in their conversion (1:6) and their experience of suffering (2:14). They became imitators not only of Paul but of the Lord (see 1:6 and 2:15). Furthermore, their imitation made them a model to believers, not to potential believers (Ernst von Dobschütz, *Die Thessalonicher-Briefe*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament begründet von Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, 7th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1909], 73).

³⁵Seneca similarly finds *exempla* more helpful and easier to follow than *praecepta* (*Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* 6. 5f.; 75. 1ff.; 40. 1; cited in Abraham J. Malherbe, “I Thessalonians as a Paraenetic Letter” [paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, 1972], 7).

³⁶Johannes Schneider, “*kolakeuō kolakia*” in *TDNT*, 3:817-18, and the literature cited in Betz, 55 nn. 15-17.

the gospel with frank boldness (*eparrēsiasmetha*, 2:2), he was at the same time gentle (*ēpioi*, 2:7)³⁷ among them—like the loving affection of a nursing mother for her own children.³⁸ Because his friendship with the Thessalonians was authentic, Paul considered it a pleasure to share with them not only the gospel of God, but himself as well. His gentleness was inspired by his friendship for his converts “because you became beloved to us” (2:8).

As “faith” comprehended the Thessalonians’ relationship to God in 3:6, so friendship defined their relationship with Paul. Their friendship caused them to remember one another (1:3; 2:9) constantly in their prayers.³⁹ As true friends, they yearned to be together (2:8, 17; 3:6; cf. 2:8, 17-19; 3:6, 10-12). Thus, Paul prayed (3:10-11) that he might see his friends again. The object of his anticipated visit was parenetic—to encourage them to continue living lives of virtue. Paul did what true friends were expected to do—encourage one another “to live and to please God, just as you are doing . . . more and more” (4:1 RSV).

B. Friendship in Philippians

1. Equality. Nowhere in Philippians does Paul identify himself as an “apostle.” This coincides well with the friendly, egalitarian tone of the letter as a whole. The prescript refers to Paul and Timothy, the cosenders of the letter, as both “slaves of Christ Jesus” (cf. Romans 1:1). This “vocational terminology” anticipates the letter’s repeated emphasis on humble service.⁴⁰ In no other letter does Paul join himself in an egalitar-

³⁷The weight of external evidence favors the preferred reading of NA²⁷—*nēpioi*, “babies.” But the internal evidence favors the alternative reading preferred here. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994), 561-62.

³⁸Abraham J. Malherbe, “‘Gentle as a Nurse,’ The Cynic Background to I Thess. ii” in *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 211.

³⁹See 1 Thess. 1:2; 3:6; cf. Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Phlm. 4. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. trans. and ed., William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *mneia* 2.

⁴⁰See 1:7, 22, 29, 30; 2:3, 5, 7, 8, 22, 25; 3:7, 10, 12-13; 4:3, 13. Ronald Russell, “Pauline Letter Structure in Philippians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982), 297.

ian manner with a co-sender,⁴¹ subtly anticipating the theme of “partnership” (*koinōnia*).⁴²

2. Partnership. In Phil. 1:3-11 Paul rehearsed and celebrated the Philippians’ “partnership in the gospel.”⁴³ But they were partners in other respects as well. Shared joy⁴⁴ gave the friends reason for encouragement despite hardships and the threat of death. Not only were they “partners in good news” (1:4), they were “partners in God’s grace,”⁴⁵ and “partners in suffering” (see 2:6-10; 3:10). All they shared in common had a Christological basis.

Paul’s exhortations in 2:1-16 characterize the “mindset” (2:2, 5) he expected of Christian friends. The antithesis of the self-assertiveness that would threaten the fruitfulness of their partnership and unanimity of purpose (2:3-4) is illustrated in the humble self-renunciation of the Christ-hymn (in 2:5-11). For Christ, humility involved suffering and “death, even death on a cross;” but it was his other-regarding attitude God vindicated. This same attitude is illustrated in Paul’s self-description in 3:4-16 and in his description of his friends—the Philippians (in 2:12, 16 and 30), Timothy (in 2:19-23), and Epaphroditus (in 2:25-30).

Paul recommended his closest friend, the letter’s co-sender Timothy, as his soul-mate (*isopsychos*—2:20)⁴⁶ and his “son in the service of the

⁴¹Cf. the reference to Timothy in 2:19-24. All the letters of the Pauline corpus mention co-senders except Romans, Ephesians, and the Pastorals. Elsewhere he names and identifies himself first (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1-2; Col. 1:1) or simply avoids vocational terminology (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

⁴²On this theme see J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 51-77, esp. 61-62. William J. Dalton (“The Integrity of Philippians,” *Biblica* 60 [1979], 101) suggests that the theme of partnership “dominates the whole text.”

⁴³This partnership began in the past with Paul’s first visit, continued until the present, and promised a favorable future completion at the parousia (1:5-6, 10).

⁴⁴A repeated theme throughout the letter is the irrepressible joy Paul has in their extraordinary friendship (*chara*—1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1; *chairō*, “I rejoice,” in 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10; and *synchairō*, “I rejoice together,” in 2:17, 18).

⁴⁵Phil. 1:7, cf. 1:29-30; 2:13; 4:13, 19.

⁴⁶The term *isopsychos*, literally “same-soul,” certainly connotes more than simply “confidant” (Panayotis Christou, “Isopsychos: Phil. 2:20,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 [1951], 296). See R. Alan Culpepper, “Co-Workers in Suffering: Philippians 2:19-30,” *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980), 349-58.

gospel” (2:22).† Timothy was Paul’s colleague most like himself in his anxious concern for their Philippian friends (cf. 2:20, 28). Paul’s concern for the Philippians also explained why he was returning to Philippi their “apostle” Epaphroditus. Paul similarly recommended him as an intimate friend—his brother, fellow-worker, fellow-soldier, who had ministered to Paul’s needs in their behalf (2:25). He, like Timothy, was deeply concerned for their well-being. Both friends would represent Paul to the Philippians in his absence. Thus, Paul urged the Philippians to honor them, and others like them (*tous toioutous*), just as they would Paul (2:28-30; cf. 1:25-26).

3. Moral Excellence. The ultimate goal of the partnership between Paul and his Philippian friends was not to further their selfish ends, but “the glory [*doxan*] and praise [*epainon*] of God.”⁴⁷ This was to be accomplished through Paul’s missionary activities and through the virtuous lives of the Philippians (1:9-11). Christ was the unifying basis of their friendship and the source of their mutual pride.⁴⁸

Although Paul’s explicit call for imitation did not come until late in the letter (3:17; 4:9), the description (in 1:27-30) of his ethos provided the model for their partnership —productivity and faithfulness. Whether or not Paul survived, the Philippians were to live as responsible citizens (*politeuomai*—1:27; cf. 2:1-4; 4:1-3) so as to advance the cause of Christ. Although suffering had not hindered the productiveness (*karpos*, “fruit” = “profit,” in 1:11, 22; 4:17) of their partnership, partisanship (*eritheia*) among them would be counter-productive (2:12-18).⁴⁹ Whatever their

⁴⁷Phil. 1:11, 20, 26; 2:11; 3:3, 21; 4:10, 20. Note the antithesis of *doxa*—*kenodoxia*, “vain glory” or “empty conceit” in 2:3.

⁴⁸Phil. 1:26; 2:16; 3:3; 4:1, 10, 17.

⁴⁹The letter’s repeated emphasis on unanimity of mind is probably more a reflection of Paul’s concern for the favorable outcome (see 2:16) of their existing partnership and the contrasting rivalry among the Christians in the city of his imprisonment (1:15-17) than an indication of an alleged Philippian tendency to divisiveness (against Helmut Koester, “The Purpose of the Polemic of A Pauline Fragment [Philippians III],” *New Testament Studies* 8 [1962], 43). It was Paul’s situation, not that of the Philippians, that motivated his mention of their “opponents” and their need to persevere in their labors in behalf of the gospel (1:28-29). Despite Paul’s reference to the Philippians as partners in the same struggle he faced (1:30), obviously the entire church was not in prison facing possible execution. Paul nowhere in the letter identifies the opponents more completely, and one can only speculate about whether they are to be equated with or distinguished from the unworthy persons with whom he contrasts the Philippians’ ethos in 2:15 (“a crooked and perverse generation”) and his own ethos in chapter 3.

opponents might do, the Philippians were to be of “one mind” (1:27) and to accept suffering as a sign of their deliverance (*sōtēria*), following Paul’s example (1:28-30).

Paul single-mindedly pursued the purpose to which Christ had called him (3:12-14) and urged the Philippians to do the same. “Friends [*adelphoi*], become fellow imitators of me [*symmimētai mou ginesthe*], and keep a close eye on all those who live their lives in this way as you have an example [*typon*] in us” (3:17).† Paul interpreted this call to imitation in 4:8-9 as a call to “pursue the moral excellence [*aretē*] you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.”†

4. Unity. Paul emphasized the singlemindedness expected among friends⁵⁰ with his repeated mention of the Philippians’ unanimity of thought.⁵¹ Likewise, his frequent repetition of “all”⁵² emphasized the corporate solidarity of the Philippians.⁵³ Paul’s concern for unanimity was also demonstrated in his frank rejoinder to two female leaders of the community “to agree in the Lord” (4:2-3).

The themes of friendship, introduced in Philippians’ prescript and thanksgiving (1:1-11),⁵⁴ are noted again in the letter’s postscript/*peroratio* (4:8-23). The body of the letter (1:12–2:30) briefly described Paul’s current circumstances to reassure his separated friends with the good news that his imprisonment had not hindered, but had actually advanced the cause of their partnership (1:12, 18). Even the Roman authorities had come to realize that his “imprisonment [was] for Christ” (1:13). Whether through suffering or deliverance (*sōtēria*—1:19; cf. 1:28), Paul was making Christ known (1:20; cf. 2:8; 3:10).⁵⁵

⁵⁰Sampley, *Pauline Partnership*, 62-70.

⁵¹The verb *phronein*, “to think” (in 1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 10) appears ten times in Philippians and only twelve times in the balance of the Pauline corpus.

⁵²A form of *pas* appears in 1:1, 7, 8, 25; 2:17; and 4:21.

⁵³J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 83.

⁵⁴See Robert Jewett, “The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians,” *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 49-53; and Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul’s Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St. Paul*, SNTSMS, vol. 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 203-214.

⁵⁵Paul was “the place of the epiphany of Christ before the world”(Joachim Gnilka, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. by R. A. Wilson, *New Testament for Spiritual Reading*, vol. 17 [New York: Crossroads, 1981], 25).

5. Loyalty. Paul's imprisonment prevented him from ministering to the needs of the Philippians (cf. 1:24-26; 4:19), as their friendship required, at least until his soon expected release (2:24). But in his absence his friends Timothy and Epaphroditus would stand in for him as his alter ego. These mutual friends of Paul and the Philippians would serve as a liaison between the separated friends, exchanging news of their welfare and rendering the mutual service that geographical distance prevented. Neither of these men needed an introduction. Paul's recommendation told the Philippians nothing they did not already know.⁵⁶ But the visit of these friends was to provide an occasion for renewed rejoicing in the Lord, anticipating the return to Philippi of Paul himself (2:28-29).

6. Frankness. Paul's stinging words beginning in Phil. 3:2 are not as abrupt a transition as many commentators presume. Paul contrasted his exemplary ethos with the behavior of those he discredited with as much vigor as he recommended the examples of his two companions. True friends owe it to their friends to warn them against evildoers. Like his recommendations, these warnings offered no new information. They were reminders of admonitions frequently given before, when Paul was with them in person (3:18).⁵⁷

7. Christology. The real contrast in Philippians 3 was not between legalistic Jews and Christians, but between the person Paul once had been and new person he was in Christ.⁵⁸ Paul now refused to boast in his own achievements, not because he had none to claim (3:4). With obvious allusions to the Christ hymn, Paul insisted that having achieved success as a Pharisee, he took his "gain" and, instead of exploiting it (cf. 2:7), counted

⁵⁶Epaphroditus was a Philippian, one of their own, whose mission to Paul and scrape with death were not news to them (2:25-26). And of Timothy, Paul wrote: "You know his proven character [*dokimē*]" (2:22). He was Paul's associate in their founding visit to Philippi (see Acts 16-17).

⁵⁷Paul's tactic observes Greco-Roman cultural expectations of inoffensive self-praise in the interests of ethical purposes. He praised others whose character was like his own, enlivening his exhortation with deeds as well as words to inspire emulation on the part of his readers. He contrasted the deeds of those worthy of praise with those deserving of blame, showing the vices to avoid as well as the virtues to pursue. See Plutarch's moral essay, "On Praising Oneself Inoffensively," in *Moralia* 539A-547F.

⁵⁸G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 135.

it (cf. 2:6) as “loss” (3:4-8). God’s grace had transformed him from one zealous for personal achievement into a true friend, whose supreme goal was to know Christ (3:7-11), even to “share [*koinōnian*] in his sufferings and become like him in his death [*symmorphizomenos tēn ek nekrōn*]” (3:10).⁵⁹ According to Lucian there is no greater proof of friendship toward a friend “than that of sharing his death [*koinōnēsas tou thanatou*]” (§20).

Paul concluded his autobiographical remarks as he began them (3:2-4), by contrasting his ethos with that of others (3:17-19). Here he referred not to legalists who trusted too much in human success, but to libertines who indulged in human shame. His description of them as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (not “enemies of Christ”) makes it certain that he referred to professing Christians⁶⁰ who had little appreciation for the selfless friendship modeled by Christ and reflected in Timothy, Epaphroditus, the Philippians, and Paul himself.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians sought to strengthen the intensity of their commitment to their friendship in the face of competing values. The virtues he promoted he found modeled in the attitude of Christ: a disposition toward unity as friends and a willingness to serve and rejoice in the interests of this partnership in spite of suffering, motivated by the glory and praise of God.⁶¹

⁵⁹The use of *syn*-prefixes is as common in the friendship literature as it is in Paul, emphasizing the togetherness of the shared experiences of friends.

⁶⁰That Paul called them enemies of the cross “implies a theological judgment concerning the[ir] understanding of Christian existence” (Koester, “Philippians III,” 325).

⁶¹The theme of friendship is certainly prominent in Philippians. But Gordon D. Fee (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 12-14) overstates the evidence when he calls Philippians “a hortatory letter of friendship” (p. 12). Charles B. Cousar (*Reading Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* [Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001], 119) more modestly insists:

Christ transforms the social reciprocity between writer and readers into a three-way relationship--Paul, the Philippians, and Christ. It is a mutual sharing in the gospel that binds writer and readers together and undergirds the exhortations to unity and community. . . . Just as the conventions of friendship shape and structure the document, so this strong Christocentric focus expands and modifies the conventions.

Conclusion

Paul should be a welcome guest in our discussion of what it means to be “friends” in the church. As we have shown, Paul’s letters to his churches were saturated with Greco-Roman philopronetic ideals. In fact, they are so steeped in friendship language that we suggest the convention of translating Paul’s frequent address of his readers as *agapētos/agapētoi* as “beloved” should be abandoned in favor of the less pious-sounding “friend/friends.” Similarly, instead of the convoluted attempts to translate Paul’s gender-neutral address *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters,” we suggest translating it simply as “friends.”⁶²

But our primary agenda is not to reform the habits of translators. It is less the terminology of friendship than Christ’s exemplary model that fundamentally distinguishes the pagan and Christian traditions. Despite the excessive and apologetic claims of some Christian word-studies, it is doubtful that the Christian *ideal* of so-called *agapē*-love is substantially different from or superior to pagan ideals of *philia*. Of course, we might debate whether theory and practice coincide.

We are not interested in debating whether the striking Greco-Roman parallels on the subject of friendship suggest that Paul’s education and background were more Hellenistic than Jewish. After all, Hellenistic Jews like Sirach⁶³ and Philo,⁶⁴ had written well before Paul’s time on the subject. And Paul had been a successful missionary among the Gentiles for more than fifteen years when he wrote his first letter preserved in the New Testament. Perhaps it was by this means that he became acquainted with the conventional cultural wisdom concerning friendship.

We are intrigued by Paul’s willingness to make cultural notions of friendship a primary means of describing the relationship between himself and his churches and the mutual relations within them. He did not hesitate to present Jesus Christ as the ideal patron-friend and himself as Christ’s retainer-friend. He described mutual relations between Christians in most respects very much like those pagans described their understanding of “friendship.” Greco-Roman convictions about friendship are strik-

⁶²This is the usual practice throughout Gerald F. Hawthorne’s *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Dallas: Word, 2002). See, for example, 177 and 188.

⁶³See, e.g., Ecclesiasticus 6:5-17; 9:10; 12:1-12; 13:21; 14:13; 19:4-17; 22:19-26; 27:16-21; 30:1-6; 37:1-6.

⁶⁴Stählin, 9:158-159.

ingly similar to Paul's depiction of the church as a unified body whose members are not competitors, but partners who care for the needs of one another (1 Corinthians 12-14).

To be sure, Paul makes his own contribution to the general discussion of friendship. Unlike Cicero, Plutarch, and Lucian, for example, Paul was not interested in clearly defining the limits of friendship. All who were in Christ might become his friends and friends of one another. Christians could potentially unite a wide range of friends. Of course, ethnic, social, and gender differences did not magically disappear within the Pauline vision of the church. But such differences were inconsequential, because baptism into Christ had made them one (Gal. 3:27-28). Paul had a greater tolerance for diversity within the Christian body of friends than his Greco-Roman counterparts imagined possible. And he expected Christian friends to be far more heterogeneous, numerous, and equal than did his pagan contemporaries allowed.

Another adaptation of the general consensus on friendship regards Paul's notion of reciprocity. Perhaps because of the incredible generosity of Christ, their divine patron-friend, Paul does not have to urge his Christian friends to reciprocate with acts of love and kindness in the same way as often as seemed far less concerned with reciprocity than his pagan counterparts. Jesus' suffering and death modeled what it meant to be true friends. Paul similarly assured his friends: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for you" (2 Cor. 12:15a; NRSV). Thus, Paul characteristically pointed to himself and other selfless examples of unstinting Christlike friendship to show how true Christian friends should reciprocate (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:1-12; Gal. 4:12-20; Phil. 2:1-30).⁶⁵

These differences aside, more often than not the Greco-Roman concepts of friendship abound. From his earliest to his latest letters, Paul described his diverse Christian communities as mutual friends in a society defined not by uniformity, but by loyalty to, unity with, and partnership in Christ. Paul's letters echo with the yearnings of separated friends who longed to be together. As mutual friends of Christ, Paul expected his churches to share more than common meals; they were to share a common life. Their ideals and aspirations were defined by Christ. They were to lead lives of moral excellence and to give themselves sacrificially for

⁶⁵J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 420.

one another. To spur one another on toward the moral excellence defined by the model of Christ, they spoke frankly, in Christlike gentleness, with words intended to save, not shame one another.

Paul wrote to his churches as a friend who celebrated the loyalty of his friends to Christ and to himself despite difficult circumstances (1 Thessalonians), who was shocked at the potential loss of good friends drifting down the wrong path thanks to false friends (Galatians), and who could wax effusive in his gratitude for friends who selflessly shared all they were and lived as partners in giving glory to God (Philippians).

Is there anything that a theological tradition that has described the epitome of Christian experience as “perfect love” (the Wesleyan/Holiness) can learn from ancient notions of friendship? Did the early Methodist bands and societies owe anything to John Wesley’s recognition of such friendship as the context in which the early church was born and grew? Perhaps, as Wesley’s successors, our notions of love might be considerably less ethereal and more relevant in our postmodern context if we gave greater attention to the demands of the friendship that Paul embraced for his churches. Such a church would embody today the ideals of friendship identified in this paper: unity, partnership, equality, moral excellence, frankness, and loyalty.

FRIENDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY IN THE PARABLES OF JESUS

by

Jirair S. Tashjian

The gospels portray Jesus as one who regularly practiced friendship and hospitality in his life and ministry, so much so that scribes and Pharisees grumbled that he welcomed sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:2). Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man who “has come eating and drinking” and is accused of being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34). People such as Levi, Zacchaeus, Martha, Mary, and the two from Emmaus invite Jesus into their homes and offer him hospitality. Jesus also accepts invitations from Pharisees (Luke 7:36; 14:1).

Friendship and hospitality are recurring themes in the sayings of Jesus, particularly in Luke. At one point Jesus even makes pronouncements about proper conduct for guests and hosts (Luke 14:7-14). Friendship and hospitality also crop up frequently in the parables of Jesus. One can readily think of the Good Samaritan, the Great Banquet, the Prodigal Son, the Dishonest Manager, and the Rich Man and Lazarus, all of which, except possibly one (the Great Banquet), are unique to Luke. Of all the gospels, Luke is particularly interested in presenting Jesus as a friend and host to the marginalized in society.¹

¹R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke* (The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. IX; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 21-27; Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 84-94.

Yet in all of the above parables, and some others besides, there is a painful turn in which hospitality is rejected, friendship is ruptured, and there are dire consequences. In the Prodigal Son, there is no indication whether the elder son would be reconciled with his brother, or even with his father. In the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite pass by without offering friendship and hospitality to the victim. In some parables, friendship is reciprocated by violence, even to the point of murder. In the Wicked Tenants (Luke 20:9-19), the servants who are sent to receive a share of the produce are abused and humiliated by the tenants, and according to two of the gospels, some of them are killed (Matt. 21:35; Mark 12:5). When the owner sends his own son, thinking that the tenants would honor him, they kill him instead, apparently in an attempt to seize the vineyard. In retaliation, the owner threatens to destroy the tenants and to give the vineyard to others.

In the parable of the Great Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24), a certain man invites many guests to a great dinner. But at the time of the dinner those who were invited give various excuses and refuse to come. According to Matthew, they even kill the messengers who come to deliver the invitations. In anger, the host invites people off the street and proceeds with his banquet. In Matthew, where the host is a king and the dinner is a wedding banquet for his son, the king sends his troops, destroys the recalcitrant guests, and burns their city. Then he proceeds with the banquet with guests brought in off the street. Matthew's version has a further scene in which the king sees a guest without a wedding garment and has him bound hand and foot and thrown out into the outer darkness.

A third parable, *Workers in the Vineyard* (Matt. 20:1-16), a story that seemingly portrays a "gracious employer,"² ends nastily when he curtly dismisses one of the workers for complaining that all of them were paid the same wages, one denarius, whether they worked one hour or twelve.

How is it that friendship and hospitality turn so sour in these parables? What were the intentions of Jesus? If the ministry of Jesus was one of friendship and hospitality, how is it that these parables have so much dissonance, alienation, rage, and vindictiveness? Is this the nature of the kingdom of God as Jesus understood it? Is this how Jesus portrayed God? Or is it the case that the theological concerns of the evangelists made these parables into something entirely different from what Jesus had in

²So entitled by Robert H. Stein, *Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 124.

mind, so they must be set aside and the message of the historical Jesus be painstakingly extracted from the texts of the gospels?

Option One: Jesus and the Gospels Portray a Violent God

Several interpretive options are possible and have been undertaken by different critics. One option is to affirm that the meaning of these parables is essentially the same for Jesus and the gospel writers. We have no independent access to Jesus apart from the gospels. This, however, need not be taken as a liability, as the quest for the historical Jesus in the last two centuries tended to do.³ Accordingly, alienation and violence in the parables are concomitants of the kingdom of God, whether in the message of Jesus or in the theology of the evangelists.

In the parable of the Wicked Tenants, the vineyard owner is an allegory for God. The servants are the prophets whom God sent. The killing of the son is a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. In the end, God will destroy the tenants, who symbolize the leaders of Israel, and will give the vineyard to others, who represent the new leadership among the followers of Jesus. In this interpretation, Jesus is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, which eventually happens some forty years later. This option says that these allegorical references in the parable must not all be taken as the creation of the evangelists, but can be reasonably situated in the historical setting of Jesus. "There is no reason Jesus could not have intended similarly detailed symbolism behind the images of servants and son, including a veiled self-reference."⁴ While recognizing redactional elements in the parable, Brad Young asks, "Is it so far-fetched to view the gospel texts as foretelling the prophet's death in Jerusalem? At least the idea that Jesus was aware of his impending death and that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed seems to be embedded in the gospel tradition at the earliest stages of its development."⁵

³In a recent publication, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), James D. G. Dunn argues against the prevailing assumptions of the quest of the historical Jesus of the last two centuries.

⁴Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 250.

⁵Brad H. Young, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 284. See also C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 96-102; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2nd rev. ed; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 76.

In Matthew's parable of the Great Banquet, and to a lesser extent in Luke's version, friendship and hospitality turn to anger, violence, murder, and outright war. The king, an allegory for God, sends his troops and kills those who spurned his invitation and scorches their city, presumably an allegory for the destruction of Jerusalem. Did Jesus understand God to be violent and vindictive? If so, how do we square this with other sayings of Jesus in Matthew that portray God as the Father in heaven who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45)?

In the view of certain commentators, Jesus understood God to be like the king in the above parable who wreaks havoc on those who murdered his servants. The wrath of God is engrained in Scripture and is not to be trifled with, so the argument goes. Although the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew presents a portrait of a merciful and gracious God, Matthew is equally insistent that humanity must reckon with the judgment of God. One of the recurring themes in Matthew is the terrifying prospect of being cast out into the outer darkness or the furnace of fire "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

Interpreting the authority figure in these parables as an allegory for God rests on a long and well-established tradition of biblical interpretation, both ancient and modern. Irenaeus sees the master in the parable of the Wicked Tenants to represent God: "God planted the vineyard of the human race when at the first He formed Adam and chose the fathers.... But last of all He sent to those unbelievers His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the wicked husbandmen cast out of the vineyard when they had slain Him."⁶ The king in the Great Banquet is likewise an allegory for God. Irenaeus says, "But those who have indeed been called to God's supper, yet have not received the Holy Spirit, because of their wicked conduct 'shall be,' He declares, 'cast into outer darkness.'"⁷ So also in the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, "one and the same God is declared as having called some in the beginning. . . others during the intermediate period. . . and others again in the end of time."⁸

⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36:2, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 1:515.

⁷Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36:6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:517.

⁸Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 36:7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:518.

Modern interpreters, though informed and cautious about the excesses of allegory, have for the most part not been able to read the authority figure in these parables in any other way than as an allegory for God. Jeremias, for example, concludes his discussion of the Wicked Tenants as follows: “We are now in a position to answer the question concerning the original meaning of the parable. Like so many other parables of Jesus, it vindicates the offer of the gospel to the poor. You, it says, you tenants of the vineyard, you leaders of the people! you have opposed, have multiplied rebellion against God.”⁹ So also in the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke, the host, whom Jeremias considers a wealthy tax-collector, is interpreted as an allegory for God. Jesus does not hesitate, according to Jeremias, to choose such a figure “to illustrate both the wrath and the mercy of God.”¹⁰ In the parable of the “Good Employer,” Jeremias’s title for the parable is “Workers in the Vineyard,” and “God is depicted as acting like an employer who has compassion for the unemployed and their families. . . . Will you then murmur against God’s goodness? That is the core of Jesus’ vindication of the gospel: Look what God is like—all goodness.”¹¹

While Hultgren recognizes allegorical elaborations in the Synoptic texts of the Wicked Tenants, he concludes that a basic four-part structure of the parable can be reasonably situated within the ministry of Jesus prior to his crucifixion, as follows:

The owner of the vineyard (=God)

- (1) leases a vineyard (=Israel) to tenants (=Israel’s leaders, the Sanhedrin);
- (2) he sends his slaves (=the prophets) to gather fruits, but they are rejected;
- (3) he sends his son (=Jesus), who is treated shamefully and killed;
- (4) he gives the vineyard to new tenants (=new leaders to replace the Sanhedrin).¹²

⁹Jeremias, 76.

¹⁰Ibid., 179.

¹¹Ibid., 139.

¹²Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 361-362.

Hultgren similarly finds the host in the Great Banquet and the employer in the Workers in the Vineyard to be an allegory for God in Jesus' telling of these parables.¹³

Both Jesus and the gospel traditions testify to the notion that resistance, rejection, refusal of friendship, withdrawal of hospitality, and consequent violence seemingly are the manner in which the kingdom of God happens in a world such as ours. When one follows this trajectory, the theological implication is that the divine-human encounter cannot take place without violent acts. The theological consequences of such a trajectory are immense, as illustrated by Hans Boersma's recent publication, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*. While the book is not specifically on the parables of Jesus, it is nonetheless relevant to the subject at hand.

Writing from the perspective of Reformed theology, but with a critical eye, Boersma begins his study with the question, "Is it really possible to give a theological account of the hospitality of God? Or is such a notion a mere chimera, and are we inevitably and forever mired in violence?"¹⁴ The thesis of his book is that the practice of hospitality, including God's hospitality, is always accompanied by violence on this side of the final eschatological consummation.¹⁵ Violence is not always morally negative and under certain circumstances can be justified and even regarded as an act of love.¹⁶ God's essential nature is love, not violence or wrath. Therefore, God's pure hospitality in the eschaton always beckons us "to implement a hospitality that reduces violence as much as possible and promotes the kingdom of eternal justice and peace."¹⁷ However, in the constraints of our present historical conditions, "our welcome of the

¹³Ibid., 41-42, 339, 348-349. Others with a similar understanding of the authority figure as an allegory for God include Dodd, 93-95, 117-119; Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 132, 137, 154-155; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 587, 726; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 340-343; David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 84; 161-164.

¹⁴Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 9.

¹⁵Ibid., 38, 151, 179, 257.

¹⁶Ibid., 43. This ultimately, of course, takes him to a just war position as over against pacifism (43-47).

¹⁷Ibid., 50.

stranger and the prodigal will necessarily involve some restraint, conditionality, and even violence.”¹⁸

In Boersma’s reading of Jesus’ parables, the authoritative figure or host represents God. The parables demonstrate divine hospitality as a model for human hospitality.¹⁹ Since divine hospitality in the present time may involve violence, the hostile response of the authoritative figure in the parables toward those who reject him or his representatives does not pose a theological or ethical dilemma for Boersma. If the conduct of the king in the parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22 is a divine model for human conduct, one cannot easily escape the conclusion that mobilization of troops and burning of cities are at times legitimate ways to respond to those who reject the gospel invitation. How do we then harmonize such an outcome with the call of Jesus to his followers to be merciful as God is merciful?

Another Option: Yes to Jesus, No to the Gospels

Another option in the interpretation of these parables is that, in the historical setting of the gospel writers, friendship and hospitality have indeed taken a different turn from what they were in the ministry of Jesus. While almost all NT scholars are willing to make at least some distinction between the message of Jesus and the theological concerns of the gospel writers, some interpreters have gone a step further. In the view of these interpreters, it is necessary to bracket out the theological concerns of the gospel writers and by means of the historical-critical method “excavate”²⁰ the Jesus of history from canonical and non-canonical sources. Some critics have even claimed that the gospel writers misunderstood or intentionally altered the message of Jesus altogether. The quest of the historical Jesus in the nineteenth century and the work of the Jesus Seminar in our day would be prime examples of such an approach. Robert W. Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar, in his 1996 publication *Honest to Jesus*,

¹⁸Ibid., 178. In light of such considerations, Boersma reflects on the death of Christ and goes on to critique the three major atonement theologies of Christus Victor, penal substitution, and moral influence. Boersma argues that the violence involved in the cross has redemptive qualities only because of the resurrection of Jesus and the final resurrection in the eschaton.

¹⁹Ibid., 217-218.

²⁰John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (Harper-SanFrancisco, 2001).

lists several barriers blocking the way to Jesus of Nazareth. Among these are the following: ignorance, popular images of Jesus, *the gospels as inerrant and infallible*,²¹ a self-serving church and clergy, and the foibles of biblical scholarship.²² The purpose of the Jesus Seminar and that of Funk is to “liberate Jesus from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him.”²³ The canonical gospels “endeavor to authenticate the leadership of the church then in power. The authentic words of Jesus reject the notion of privileged position among his followers.”²⁴

More specifically with regard to the parables, Funk insists that “Jesus quite deliberately articulated an open-ended, non-explicit vision in his parables and aphorisms. He did not prescribe behavior or endorse specific religious practices. . . . Our interpretation of the parables should be more parables—polyvalent, enigmatic, humorous, and nonprescriptive.”²⁵ Funk then draws out the implications of such an understanding of Jesus’ parables for the issue of friendship and hospitality:

Jesus kept an open table. Jesus ate promiscuously with sinners, toll collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and other social misfits. . . . Yet his followers, in ritualizing the meal Jesus ate periodically with his friends, began to limit participation to those who belonged to the Christian community. . . . We have to ask, would Jesus have condoned, to say nothing of authorized, a table open only to self-authenticating believers? Should we reconceive the scope of eating together in Christian communities, as well as the function of the eucharist?²⁶

A Third Option: Focus on the Sitz im Leben of Jesus

Other recent interpreters, while practicing a quest of the historical Jesus, do not go so far as to discredit the gospel writers as Funk does. Their intention is to understand Jesus of Nazareth and his message in the historical setting of his life and ministry, without necessarily discounting

²¹Emphasis added.

²²Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 47; cf. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 262.

²³Funk., 300.

²⁴Ibid., 311.

²⁵Ibid., 305.

²⁶Ibid., 310.

the theological agenda of the evangelists.²⁷ Located somewhere within this approach to the parables of Jesus is William R. Herzog II.²⁸ Herzog's study is limited to selected parables and not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of all the parables. His work is a dramatic departure from the scholarly consensus concerning the authority figure and other characters in the parables that he has chosen to discuss. Most significantly, the authority figure is not an allegory for God, but represents the system of oppression in the historical setting of Jesus.²⁹ Furthermore, the characters in the parables that have been thought to be negative are really the protagonists. In the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), for example, the third servant who hides the talent is the hero of the story.³⁰ In fact, Herzog characterizes him as "a whistle-blower"³¹ who exposes the sham and greed of the elite who exploit the disenfranchised. Thus, in telling this story, Jesus becomes a pedagogue of the oppressed by giving voice to the plight of the poor and the hungry who are suffering while wealthy landowners reap huge profits. In effect, Jesus extends friendship and hospitality to the third servant who is now cast out into the outer darkness for his refusal to participate in systems of oppression.

Herzog interprets the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20) in a similar fashion. The title that he chooses for the parable, "Blaming the Victims of Oppression," is itself indicative of the direction that he will take. The elite owned vineyards to produce wine, a luxury item to export for monetary purposes. Large estates were acquired through foreclosures

²⁷For example, Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Arland Hultgren.

²⁸William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).

²⁹Scott had earlier noted the difficulties involved in equating the employer with God (282-284).

³⁰Herzog, 167; similarly, Robert T. Fortna, "Reading Jesus' Parable of the Talents through Underclass Eyes," in *Forum* 8 (1995), 211-228; Richard Q. Ford, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 45-46; Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 124-125, 305. Joel R. Wohlgenut, "Entrusted Money," in *Jesus and His Parables* (ed. V. George Shillington; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 116-119, has raised questions concerning the viability of Herzog's (and the others') interpretation.

³¹Herzog, 165.

on loans and hostile takeovers of peasant farms. In Jesus' telling of the parable, the multiple trips to the agora to hire additional laborers are indicative of the magnitude of the harvest so that even the owner cannot calculate the amount of help needed.³² Because of high unemployment, the laborers have no choice but to agree to a mere denarius for a whole day's work, not a generous pay by any means. In subsequent trips to the marketplace, the owner simply tells the workers that he will give them what is right. The workers are in no position to bargain with the employer, who alone will determine the wages. "Far from being generous, then, the householder is taking advantage of an unemployed work force."³³ Herzog interprets the final scene of the payment of wages also in accord with the oppressive system of the social world of Jesus. The owner shames the first-hired by paying them the same amount as those who were hired last. "He values their daylong effort in the scorching heat no more than the brief labor of the eleventh-hour workers."³⁴ The final dismissal of the complaining worker is not a friendly "go in peace." Even the words that he uses, "I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you," indicate that it is a matter of the owner's charity, which robs the laborers of any sense of honor. His claim that he is free to do what he wishes with what belongs to him "is akin to rubbing salt in their wounds," given the fact that what belongs to him has been acquired through exploitation.³⁵

If Herzog's reading of the parable is on target,³⁶ what is Jesus accomplishing by telling such a story? He is subverting the oppressive structures of his day by exposing the systems of injustice and thereby offering the disenfranchised the comfort of knowing that the dawning of the kingdom of God will bring about the year of Jubilee, as also echoed in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus pronounces on the

³²Ibid., 85.

³³Ibid., 86.

³⁴Ibid., 91.

³⁵Ibid., 93.

³⁶Herzog's analysis of this and other parables grows out of a social-science approach to the New Testament undertaken by such researchers as Norman Gottwald, John Elliott, Bruce Malina, Halvor Moxnes, Jerome Neyrey, Douglas Oakman, John Pilch, and Richard Rohrbaugh (Herzog, x). The work of Paulo Freire, a liberation theologian and Brazilian educator, has been particularly influential in Herzog's study of the parables (Ibid., 16-29).

poor, the hungry, the mourner, and the meek, and in his assurance to them that God will provide food and clothing if only they seek first the kingdom of God. The parable becomes a codification of friendship and hospitality offered by God to those who are made hopeless by the present systems of oppression.

Herzog's treatment of a third parable, the Wicked Tenants, on the other hand, reveals the folly of a misguided effort by the disenfranchised to gain their dignity and livelihood through violence. While Jesus sympathized with the plight of the disenfranchised,³⁷ and in view of the fact that the elite controlled military, economic and political power, this parable "may codify the futility of armed rebellion. . . . [This] leaves the hearers with a dilemma. How can they reclaim their honorable status as heirs if violent revolts always end in futility? Are there other ways to assert their claims?"³⁸

Although Jesus offered the promise of the kingdom of God to the disenfranchised, this parable issues a clear warning that violence is ultimately self-defeating. To the question about whether Jesus was a pacifist, Richard Horsley gives a qualified and nuanced answer. He argues on one hand that Jesus was executed as a rebel against the Roman order.³⁹ On the other hand, he finds "no evidence that Jesus himself advocated, let alone organized, the kind of armed rebellion that would have been necessary to free the society from the military-political power of the Roman empire."⁴⁰ To make his case, Horsley distinguishes between political and social revolution. The kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus meant that God had already begun the political revolution. The calling of Jesus was to social revolution that entailed transformation of social relations, which in turn created a crisis. While Horsley finds it difficult to claim that Jesus was a pacifist, he is certain that Jesus actively opposed violence.⁴¹ This, however, may be nothing more than a matter of semantics.

³⁷Malina and Rohrbaugh point out that at the earliest stage the story was "a warning to landowners expropriating and extorting the produce of the land from their tenants" (200); cf. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 352.

³⁸Herzog, 113; see also Scott, 251.

³⁹Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 320.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 321.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 324-326.

To return to Herzog's understanding of the parables, there is still one question that he does not address. Can the theological perspectives of the evangelists be harmonized with the perspective of Jesus in these parables? Is it absolutely certain, for example, that the authority figure in the parables becomes an allegory for God in the theological framework of the Gospels?

A Fourth Possibility: Friendship and Hospitality in Jesus and the Gospels

One way to move forward is to note Shillington's criticism of Herzog's interpretation of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20). Shillington points out that Herzog "argues for the rights of the fully employed, but fails to address the destitution of the non-workers in the land of promise."⁴² Shillington proposes that the parable forces both wealthy landowners and day laborers in the audience of Jesus to reflect on the issue of economic and social injustice in light of Yahweh's provision for justice implied in the law of the Sabbath. It might be somewhat of a stretch to see Sabbath in the parable, as Shillington himself admits. Rather than invoking the specific law of the Sabbath, a better option might be to think of the pervasive call to social justice throughout the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., Lev. 19:10-15; Deut. 24:12-15; Isa. 11:4; Jer. 8:19-22; Amos 5; Hosea 6:8, among many others). Seen this way, the meaning of the parable in its Matthean context would not be at odds with its meaning in the social setting of Jesus.

Matthew places this parable immediately after the episode of the rich young man who goes away grieving when Jesus tells him to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and come and follow him. This prompts some discussion about wealth, possessions, and rewards between the disciples and Jesus, which ends with the saying of Jesus, "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matt. 19:30). This saying appears again in a slightly different form at the end of the parable. The Matthean context itself should caution us against too hasty a conclusion that Matthew equates the vineyard owner with God.⁴³ Even if we grant that the introduction to the parable, "For the kingdom of heaven is

⁴²V. George Shillington, "Saving Life and Keeping Sabbath (Matt. 20:1b-15)," in *Jesus and His Parables* (ed. Shillington), 98.

⁴³Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 395, 398.

like. . . ,” is Matthean, it is not necessarily the case that the kingdom of God is akin to the actions of the vineyard owner or any other single character in the parable.⁴⁴ Thus, the friendship and hospitality demonstrated by Jesus toward the disenfranchised becomes, in Matthew’s context, a warning to members of his own community against new forms of alienation and exclusion between the privileged and the unprivileged, between the first and the last.

As for the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), or Minas as in Luke 19:11-27, are not the evangelists portraying the master in the parable as an allegory for God or Jesus? Here, Warren Carter’s observation is worth considering. Commenting on Matthean parables whose central character is an authority figure such as a king or a master, Carter points out that we must read these parables in the larger narrative context of the Gospel wherein Matthew “trains its readers to be suspicious of empires and their rulers.”⁴⁵ At the same time, Matthew employs this very same imperial paradigm, since it was readily available, to portray an alternative empire, the kingdom of God. Matthew’s use of these cultural artifacts, however, is not meant to imply that God is like the Roman emperor. Thus, Matthew can employ a parable about a king and a royal banquet, or an elitist master and his greedy retainers, to communicate a particular admonition to his readers without necessarily implying that God’s character is like that of a king or a master. Carter’s comments on the parable of the Talents are worth quoting at some length:

It seems that again the gospel has coopted dominant cultural values in picturing the establishment of God’s empire. God’s empire imitates, rather than provides an alternative to, Rome’s empire, in which the wealthy and powerful become even more so at the expense of the rest. Such co-option is not surprising, given that the gospel’s author is a creature of his cultural context.

What perhaps has happened is that the emphatic exhortation to disciples to be faithful and active slaves of Jesus until his return so dominates the shape of the story that the larger issues are neglected. . . . [N]o critique of that socioeconomic

⁴⁴See Scott’s discussion of parable and kingdom (56-62).

⁴⁵Warren Carter, “Resisting and Imitating the Empire: Imperial Paradigms in Two Matthean Parables,” in *Interpretation* 56/3 (July 2002), 271. Note, e. g., Matt. 20:25-28.

structure of their particular activities (accumulating wealth at the expense of others) is given at this point. The exhortation to faithful discipleship overrides all other concerns. The audience must hear the exhortation as well as supply the critique of the parable's content from the larger gospel context. The specific socioeconomic commitments of the master and the activities of the first two slaves are not to be imitated.⁴⁶

One should also note that the parable of the Last Judgment (Sheep and Goats), that comes immediately after the parable of the Talents, forestalls any possible misunderstanding of the ethic of God's empire. Rather than imitating the greedy conduct of the master and the first two slaves in the parable of the Talents, the disciples of Jesus are enjoined to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick and the imprisoned. Matthew has *not* distorted Jesus' message of friendship and hospitality to the disenfranchised.

The same sort of thing must be borne in mind with regard to the parable of the Minas in Luke 19:12-27. The specific conduct of the nobleman who goes to a distant country to receive royal power, and upon his return orders the slaughter of rebellious citizens, is surely not intended by Luke to be a portrait of God. Likewise, the conduct of the first two slaves who produce, undoubtedly through exploitation, a thousand or five hundred percent increase in wealth, for which they receive a commendation and promotion from their power-grabbing master, is far from being a paradigm for disciples. Luke has earlier, and indeed throughout Luke-Acts, issued warnings against preoccupation with possessions and wealth.⁴⁷ Rather, Luke employs the parable as a call to disciples "to be trustworthy while they wait for the coming of the king. . . . [T]he parable calls for faithful allegiance to a king whose kingdom is opposed to the quests of earthly kings for vengeance and profit at the expense of the poor."⁴⁸ The very fact that the parable follows on the heels of the story of Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector who, in response to Jesus, vows to give half of his possessions to the poor and compensate four times anyone that he has defrauded, ought to serve as a caution against making the specific conduct

⁴⁶Carter, *Matthew*, 488.

⁴⁷Note particularly Luke 6, 12, 16, 18, and Acts 4-5. See Thomas E. Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 135-162.

⁴⁸Culpepper, 364.

of the characters in the parable a paradigm for discipleship in the kingdom of God.

Related to the above is Luke's rewording of the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:42-45 in significant ways and relocating it to a scene following the Last Supper (Luke 22:25-26). The Lukan version reads (NRSV): "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves." Two words are unique to Luke: benefactors (*euergetai*) and leader (*heigoumenos*). In a patron-client cultural setting,⁴⁹ such as in the Roman Empire, leaders bestowed benefaction and increased status on clients who were cooperative within the system of domination. Jesus says to his disciples, "Not so with you." Friendship and hospitality among disciples must not mimic patterns of domination in the imperial culture.

Of the parables under consideration in this paper, the only one that appears in all three Synoptic Gospels is the Wicked Tenants, which may well have been allegorical to some extent right from the start,⁵⁰ even though the three Gospels have extended the allegory in accord with a Christian understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Since Matthew and Luke preserve Mark's literary context of the parable, I will restrict my comments to Mark.

Ched Myers offers a political reading of the parable in Mark that combines both the literal and the allegorical. Myers' political reading moves beyond the older historical-critical method of making a pronounced distinction between the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus and that of Mark. Myers places the writing of Mark's Gospel before AD 70 and thus he sees "a fundamental structural, if not exactly historical, symmetry between the world in which Mark sets his story of Jesus and his own world."⁵¹ Thus, Myers understands the meaning of the parable as follows:

⁴⁹Halvor Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 241-268.

⁵⁰Hultgren, 357-362; for a non-allegorical understanding, see Robert W. Funk, et al, *The Parables of Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988), 51; Scott, 248-253; Herzog, 101-113.

⁵¹Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 42.

Two levels are operating simultaneously here. At the literal level, the story is an accurate depiction of the violent struggle between disenfranchised sharecroppers and oppressive overlords, which often resulted in peasant revolts that were in turn inevitably crushed by superior forces mustered by the owners (12:9). At the allegorical level, the parable is about the ruling class (12:12). . . . It convicts them of conspiring to “own” (for commercial profit) what is God’s gift to all. This parable further undermines both the economic and political pretensions of the authorities who are already plotting against Jesus.⁵²

Myers considers Mark’s literary context of the parable essential for interpretation. The parable is preceded by the questioning of Jesus by the temple leaders about his authority to cleanse the temple (11:27-33) and followed by the entrapping question about payment of taxes to Caesar (12:13-17). Myers sees in these three pericopes what he calls nonalignment, meaning that both Jesus and Mark reject the authority claims of the Jewish elite in Jerusalem on one hand and the Roman right to impose taxes on the other hand.

Mark’s own allegiance is made clear by the entire narrative of the last three episodes taken together. . . . Mark thus in no uncertain terms rejects the option of political cooperation with Rome, and repudiated the authority of Caesar and his “coin.” . . . The three stories must be interpreted together in order to understand Mark’s ideological position. In the question of John’s baptism, Jesus rejects the Sanhedrin’s right to judge his actions; in the vineyard parable he undermines any claims they might have to “authority.” The Jewish leadership correctly understands Jesus to be repudiating its political legitimacy altogether. It then pursues an “entrapping strategy.” Mark assumes his readers know *why* the tax question would be considered particularly dangerous and compromising. . . . [T]he discourse of these three episodes strongly reasserts the ideology of “nonalignment,” a rejection of both the Roman colonial presence and the revolt.⁵³

⁵²Ched Myers, et al, *“Say to This Mountain”: Mark’s Story of Discipleship* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 160.

⁵³Myers, *Binding*, 312-313.

Concluding Remarks

What are we to conclude from this brief consideration of these selected parables? One point that must be made is that friendship and hospitality are not naïve congeniality toward all social, economic, and political structures of the world. Exploitation, injustice, and violence cannot be embraced in the name of friendship and hospitality. Viewed this way, these parables show continuity between Jesus and the evangelists. But this continuity is to be understood not in the sense that alienation and violence are necessary concomitants of the kingdom of God, but in the sense that the kingdom of God demands a life of peaceful resistance to oppressive structures in order to befriend the disenfranchised. In spite of differences between the social contexts of Jesus and the Gospels, the call to friendship and hospitality remains clear in these parables.

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD: SOCIAL ACCOMMODATION AND THE EVANGELISTIC IMPERATIVE IN 1 TIMOTHY

by

Jeffrey S. Lamp

In circles familiar with talk of contextualizing the Christian message for evangelistic purposes, one topic of discussion is the degree to which Christians should conform to their social and cultural contexts in order to secure a favorable hearing for their gospel testimony. Many disciplines make their voices heard in the discussion, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. Biblical studies is another field that should make its voice heard in this multi-disciplinary interchange.

The New Testament contains several examples of how some Christians viewed their place in society in light of their missionary mandate. One such example will form the basis of our present discussion, 1 Timothy, where the author urges Timothy to be mindful of the perception of the church in the eyes of the larger society. Throughout the letter are statements that Christian attitudes and actions should be aimed at securing a favorable assessment of the movement in the eyes of those outside the church. The paper will seek to clarify this thematic strand in the letter by identifying several textual markers in the argumentative strategy of the letter in light of the social order of its day. We seek to determine the extent and manner of the social accommodation urged.

This discussion will proceed in four stages. First, we will identify a significant feature of Roman society that appears most pertinent to the context of 1 Timothy. Second, we will survey 1 Timothy itself in order to

illustrate how the author urged accommodation to these social norms. Third, we will identify the motivation for this urged accommodation. Fourth, we will conclude with a thought experiment on a topic anticipated in the argumentation of 1 Timothy—the place of women in the ministry of the church. Our working thesis will be that the argumentation of the letter must be interpreted in light of 2:1-7, where the author states that the goal of prayer for all people is “so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity,” resulting in the realization of God’s saving program for humanity through the mission of the church in the world.

We will not let questions of critical introduction detain us here—those discussions are well rehearsed elsewhere. Our discussion will not base its conclusions on conjectures of authorship, recipient, or geographical location. Regardless of whether Paul wrote this letter or someone as late as the subsequent century, the contours of Roman social life discussed here will be more or less equally applicable to the variously proposed social locations of the letter.¹ I will, for simplicity sake, label the author “Paul” and the recipient “Timothy,” though I will do so simply because those are the labels given in the letter. Again, no theory of authorship need be presumed for this discussion, and I hope I am not unduly assuming one as this paper unfolds, despite of my choice of labels.

A matter of definition is required here as well. The term “accommodation” is used in a neutral sense. It is not to be construed as synonymous with compromising core values or assimilation into society, but rather as more of an optional, albeit beneficial conformity to the standards of that society.

Roman Social Life at the Time of First Timothy

Following the first chapter of the letter, where Paul warns Timothy of the dangers of false teachers and teaching (vv. 3-11), extols the saving mercy of God in Christ (vv. 12-17), and states the purpose for his instruction to Timothy (vv. 18-20), Timothy is instructed to make all manner of prayerful appeals to God for all people, particularly for kings and persons in authority (2:1-2). The purpose behind this prayer is so that the church

¹W. A. Richards (*Difference and Distance in Post-Pauline Christianity* [New York: Peter Lang, 2002], 140) provides a recent survey of the issues surrounding dating 1 Timothy and concludes that the various features of the letter (vocabulary, style, epistolary form) provide for a date range between 50-150. For our purposes, that is precise enough.

("we") may live lives in quiet and peace in "all godliness and dignity" (v. 2). Behind this the reader is able to hear the echo of Paul's concern to curb false teaching from ch. 1 and is then prepared to hear repeated exhortations for Timothy to combat false teaching throughout the remainder of the letter. Clearly, the presence of false teaching in the church enters it into a tumultuous state, thus threatening the stability of the church and undermining the goal of the prayers urged in 2:1-2.

This "intra-ecclesial" threat may also be at the root of concern with respect to the church's standing in the larger social sphere of the Roman Empire. Were it not enough that the repeated identification of both God and Jesus Christ as "savior" (1:1; 2:3; 4:10) and Jesus Christ as "Lord" (1:2, 12, 14; 6:3, 14, 15) constituted direct affronts to the power and values of Emperor and Empire,² a church in internal discord may be seen to be demonstrating behavior that undermines the social fabric of the Empire. This section of our discussion will identify a prominent aspect of that social fabric that may be threatened by such discord.

In the last half of the twentieth century much scholarly attention has been given to the social setting of the Pastoral Epistles, with 1 Timothy figuring prominently in such research. The focus of much of this research has been on the importance of the household in the maintenance of Roman society.³ The peace established by Augustus derived from a public morality that highly valued the family as the basic building block of society. Augustus felt that victories of the Empire were based on and thus gave vindication to the virtues of Roman morality. To ensure the continued success of and peace in the Empire, Augustus sought to legislate and institutionalize proper expressions of family life, especially supporting marriage and procreation. Two laws, the Julian Law on Marriage and the

²Defense of this position is a significant component of J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

³E.g., E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century: Some Prolegomena to the Study of New Testament Ideas of Social Obligation* (London: Tyndale, 1960); D. L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981); D. C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1983); Balch and Carolyn Osiek, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and Home Churches* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997). A concise survey is given in M. Harding, *What Are They Saying About the Pastoral Epistles?* (New York: Paulist, 2001), 46-65.

Julian Law on Adultery, effectively sought to put what was previously considered private morality under the legal oversight of the Emperor. In this way, the Emperor functioned as a “Father of the Fatherland” (*Pater Patriae*), seeing the Empire as his extended family.⁴ While these laws were seldom enforced, were frequently opposed, and were later repealed, they represent the high public value placed on marital morality in the time of the Augustan peace. Said another way, family life became foundational to the ordering of the Empire, and thus was considered part and parcel of the theology expressed in the Emperor cult and the view that the peace secured by Augustus ushered in a golden age for Rome.⁵

The scope of Roman interest in the family is evidenced in the delineation of the family unit beyond membership in the nuclear family. Servants, freedmen, and other tenants fell under the patronal responsibility of the head of the household.⁶ One tool used prophylactically to provide stability to this extended family unit was the household code (*Haustafeln*). These codes were used in the larger context of Greco-Roman philosophical and political discourse to reflect and engender the conservative conventions of society.⁷ In such a setting, the focus of the household code lay in identifying the responsibilities of inferior parties to the hierarchically established preeminence of the head of the household.

Given the importance of the family in the maintenance of Roman society, it is not surprising that perceived threats to the family structure were met with seriousness by the authorities. Threats to the structure were frequently cast in terms of undermining the integrity of the family unit, in particular the traditional patriarchal and hierarchical organization of the household that reflected the inferiority of women, children, and slaves. And this threat was not hypothetical. In an engaging study, Winter identifies the emergence of what he calls “new women” during the first century

⁴Judge describes this relationship of Emperor to Empire in terms of the patron-client relationship (*Social Pattern*, 38).

⁵See discussion of Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 96-98.

⁶Judge, *Social Pattern*, 38. Crossan and Reed demonstrate this through an examination of archaeological evidence from the period (*In Search of Paul*, 310-330).

⁷Balch and Osiek, *Families*, 40. Balch’s study of household codes in 1 Peter (*Let Wives Be Submissive*) is helpful background to the NT use of household codes.

B.C.E.⁸ These women were identified as those who eschewed the traditional roles of women in the early Empire. They were publicly prominent, engaging in political and economic roles reserved for males. They were also morally unconstrained and immodestly dressed, imitating the “avant-garde” behavior of elite women in society, perhaps even that of the women of the imperial household. In part, the emergence of these “new women” is what gave rise to the Augustan legislation mentioned earlier. Their presence was seen as a threat to the social fabric of the Empire, and as such, elicited response from the highest authorities in the Empire.

This brief survey hardly does justice to the social realities of the Roman Empire in the New Testament era, nor does it do justice to the wealth of study being done in this area. But it does provide a bit of context as we direct our attention to 1 Timothy in an attempt to understand its instruction.

First Timothy and the Roman Household

Verner sees 1 Timothy developing the idea that the church is the “household of God,” drawing on the statement of 3:15. He argues that 1 Timothy identifies the household as the basic social unit of the church and that the church is a social structure based on the household.⁹ In this section of our discussion, we will survey 1 Timothy in order to see how the household structure so important to the Roman Empire might elucidate the teaching of the letter. One caveat is necessary here: we cannot engage in deep exegesis of each passage in light of space considerations. We must restrict our observations to the interaction of the teaching of 1 Timothy and its social context.

A casual perusal of 1 Timothy does evidence a concern with household imagery. In this regard, 1 Timothy is no different from many other New Testament letters where household imagery and concepts are used to articulate the duties and responsibilities of leaders and believers in the Christian community.¹⁰ In 1 Timothy, it appears that much of the instruction is structured around three occurrences of household codes—2:8-15;

⁸B. W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). See also A. Padgett, “Wealthy Women at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in Social Context,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 19-31.

⁹Verner, *The Household of God*, 1.

¹⁰As noted by Judge, *Social Pattern*, 73, 76.

5:1-2; 6:1-2—where the performance of proper roles of those within the church is articulated in terms of socially acceptable roles of those outside the church. What is noteworthy about these household codes is that they tend to follow the normal Greco-Roman protocol in which only the inferior party of a dyad (husband-wife, parent-child, master-slave) is addressed. This is in stark contrast to other New Testament household codes (e.g., Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 3:21-4:9; 1 Pet. 3:1-7) where both parties in a dyad are addressed.¹¹ This unidirectional appropriation of the household code in 1 Timothy may indicate Paul's concern to conform family relationships within the church to those of society.

After a couple of early references to Timothy as Paul's "child" in the faith (1:2, 18), the first section of the letter that deals with familial roles is the troublesome passage 2:9-15, where the issue of public versus household roles of women comes into play. In 2:9-15 women are subjugated to male leadership in the gathered assembly. Of special concern is the public demeanor of women. Women are encouraged to dress modestly; their adornment is not described in terms of physical appearance, but good works (vv. 9-10). In the gathered assembly, they are not to assume roles that would subject men to their positional leadership (vv. 11-12). Following an appeal to the creation narrative, apparently to demonstrate the susceptibility of women to deception (vv. 13-14),¹² a perplexing reference is made to women being saved through childbearing (v. 15).¹³ While several interpretations to this verse are proffered,¹⁴ perhaps the simplest one,

¹¹B. Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 187.

¹²Wall ("1 Timothy 2:9-15 Reconsidered [Again]," *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 14 [2004]: 91-99), however, sees the story of Eve mentioned in vv. 13-14 as continuing on into v. 15, where women as women are properly the object of God's saving purposes articulated in vv. 3-6. The story of Eve appropriated here shows that the woman who was deceived and sinned is the object of God's salvation, and that the matter of childbirth in v. 15 harkens back to Gen. 3:15-16 and 4:1 where childbearing indicates the redemptive cooperation between God and woman in a way only women are capable of performing. While this is certainly possible, perhaps a simpler, even complementary, solution may come to the fore in our discussion.

¹³W. D. Mounce (*Pastoral Epistles* [WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000], 143) calls this verse "one of the strangest verses in the NT."

¹⁴See summaries in I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 467-70, and J. D. Quinn and W. C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 230-239.

especially in light of what I trust will prove to be the cumulative effect of the evidence in the letter, is that the familial role of women in the household is in view. Rather than being publicly prominent in a socially inappropriate way, women should be content to serve their proper role in the household, for they need no more than this to receive the salvation God desires for all people.¹⁵

Here we see evident the concern identified by Winter.¹⁶ Publicly prominent and immodestly adorned women were scrutinized for their rejection of the values defining their social roles. Clearly, the presence or the appearance of the presence of such women in the church would bring unwanted scrutiny from authorities. It has been suggested that perhaps the socially inappropriate teaching role of women described in 2:11-12 should be understood in light of the mention of false teaching in 4:3 that decries marriage and exalts abstinence.¹⁷ The “new women” who are teaching men in the assembly, either explicitly in their doctrine or implicitly through their lifestyle, may be advocating a position destructive of the family structure and thus the social structure of the Empire. While this is but conjecture, it is noteworthy that the exercise of inappropriate social roles by women and the false teaching mentioned in 4:3 both contribute to the type of threat to the social order that would bring scrutiny from the authorities. The solution of Paul is to restrict the dress of and prohibit teaching roles for women in the church, as Crossan and Reed state it, to relegate women to the roles defined for them in the policies of Augustus.¹⁸

Following this discussion of women’s roles is a description of the characteristics of leadership in the church in 3:1-13. Not surprisingly, leadership is described in terms that would restrict its ranks to what

¹⁵Titus 2:5 encourages women to follow the traditional roles of women so that the Word of God will not be discredited.

¹⁶Winter, *Roman Wives*, chs. 6-8 describe this in detail.

¹⁷Richards, *Difference and Distance*, 184n138; Verner, *The Household of God*, 181; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 441. D. R. MacDonald (*The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983]) argues that the Pastorals were written to combat the oral traditions that became in written form the *Acts of Paul*. In the apocryphal *Acts*, Thecla is a heroine in whom is embodied the Pauline notion of freedom in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28). She eschews traditional roles for women in order to pursue a life of active ministry. The Pastorals, then, were written to reaffirm traditional patriarchal roles in the church in conformity with social conventions.

¹⁸Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 118-119.

Verner describes as elder, well-to-do householders.¹⁹ Whatever the meaning of the phrase “one woman man” (*mias gunaikos andra*),²⁰ the assumption seems to be that the “bishop” (v. 1) and the “deacon” (v. 12) are to be married. Moreover, they must manage their households well (vv. 4-5, 12), particularly their children, because effectiveness in household management is prerequisite to management in the household of the church (v. 5). The net effect of good household management, as well as other noble personal qualities, results in the “bishop” being well thought of by outsiders (v. 7) and for the “deacon” a good standing (v. 13). As Richards puts it, leaders must be blameless in a public way.²¹ And as Crossan and Reed note, the emphasis on marriage and fertility for leaders accords well with Augustan policies.²²

The reference to the church as the household of God follows in 3:15. Coming on the heels of the discussion of “bishops” managing their households well as prerequisite to managing God’s church, Verner’s suggestion appears to have merit, namely that both household and church social order are inextricably linked. In 5:1-2 Timothy is instructed as to proper behavior with those of various age groups within the church. The admonition to treat older men as fathers, older women as mothers, young men as brothers, and young women as sisters both attests to the understanding that the church is modeled on the household and to the cultural framework for appropriate family relations. Moreover, the added stipulation for Timothy to relate to young women with absolute purity may speak to Paul’s desire to keep the perception of inappropriate sexual relationships from entering the public mind.

From this more general instruction, Paul moves into an extended discussion of the specific matter of treatment of widows within the church (5:3-16). Notwithstanding the question of whether Paul describes an official office of the widow,²³ the passage seems to describe a setting in which family members may have been foregoing their family duty to widows, requiring the church to take up such support. A significant portion of this passage is dedicated to describing the proper candidates, the “real”

¹⁹Verner, *The Household of God*, 83-111.

²⁰For options, see, e.g., G. W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 157-159.

²¹Richards, *Difference and Distance*, 155-156.

²²Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 120.

²³See the discussion in Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 273-277.

widows who may be enrolled to receive the church's assistance. At the outset of the passage, Paul commands the children and grandchildren of widows to provide for their support (v. 4).

The passage concludes in v. 16 with the call for "believing women" (*pisté*)²⁴ to render care for widows so as to alleviate the church's responsibility to do so. Such care is described as a "religious duty" that is pleasing to God, but there may be a more mundane interest here as well. Timothy is to command the children and grandchildren about these things so that they may be above reproach (v. 7), for those who fail to provide for relatives, particularly those of one's own immediate family, deny the faith and are by comparison worse than unbelievers (v. 8). The call to be above reproach seems to have in view a general assessment from those both within and outside of the church. This assumption is made more plausible by the comparison with unbelievers. In what may be an almost chiding tone, Paul notes that even unbelievers provide for their widows.²⁵ For Christians to forsake this duty is to compare unfavorably with unbelievers in terms of family support, thus demonstrating a disregard for social convention, that may in turn result in the disrepute of the gospel in society.

Timothy is instructed to encourage young widows to remarry (v. 11), for they are described as having the tendency to renounce their vows to Christ by following after their sensual desires and thus fall into the snare of Satan. Beyond this religious issue is a more practical consideration. Young widows are liable to become a public nuisance, moving beyond idleness to become busybodies given to ambulatory gossip (v. 13). Paul's solution to this is to have young widows re-enter a life in line with social family conventions: marriage, bearing children, and managing the household (v. 14). This suggests that young widows are in danger of behavior contrary to the acceptable role for women in society, behavior that results in not only the "adversary" reviling us, but perhaps also those of more terrestrial origin.²⁶

²⁴Some manuscripts read "believing men and women" (*pistos ê pistê*) or "believing men" (*pistos*). For a discussion of the rationale for the accepted reading, see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (3rd ed.; Stuttgart: UBS, 1971), 642.

²⁵Provision for aging parents in general, and for widows in particular, was integral to the social fabric in the Greco-Roman world (e.g., Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 1.37).

²⁶Johnson (*The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 275) quips, "The church would indeed be the object of severe reviling if it were perceived as a board of elderly men who financially supported a group of younger women who lived in public idleness and self-indulgence."

One final group within the Roman household structure is addressed in 6:1-2: slaves. Here believing slaves are encouraged to render obedient service to their masters, particularly believing masters. For believing slaves to serve their masters unfaithfully results in the name of God and the true teaching being blasphemed, presumably among those outside the church. Failure to live in conformity to social convention regarding slaves in the household structure brings the gospel into disrepute.²⁷

This whirlwind survey of 1 Timothy has identified several markers of interest in the church observing Greco-Roman household conventions in its own behavioral program in order to maximize the potential to live “quiet and peaceable” lives within its larger social context. The following section will seek to identify the strategic reasons for this accommodation.

The Motivation for Accommodation in First Timothy

With 2:1-7, Paul enters into the bulk of his instruction for Timothy. The placement of the passage follows soon after the first of Paul’s “faithful sayings” (*pistos logos*)²⁸ in 1:15 in which Paul, reflecting on his former sinfulness and subsequent forgiveness, generalizes “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The “faithful saying” is preparatory for the passage that stands at the fore of Paul’s instruction. Whether the phrase “first of all” (*prôton pantôn*) indicates that 2:1-7 is simply the first of the sequence of instructions that Paul will give²⁹ or is of primary importance³⁰ is probably an artificial distinction, for its very placement functions programmatically, as we shall argue, for the rest of the letter.

In vv. 1-2, Paul exhorts Timothy to pray for “all,” with particular emphasis given to “kings and all who are in high positions,”³¹ the goal of

²⁷Titus 2:10 similarly encourages slaves to perform their roles so as to be a model of the doctrine of God.

²⁸The formula occurs only in the Pastoral Epistles, 3 times in 1 Timothy (1:15; 3:1; 4:9), once in 2 Timothy (2:11), and once in Titus (3:8). For a discussion of the formula and the sayings identified by it, see Knight, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

²⁹E.g., Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 113-114.

³⁰E.g., J. D. G. Dunn, *1 Timothy* (NIB; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 797.

³¹Scholars widely observe that it was well-established in Jewish tradition to pray for rulers, even foreign rulers oppressing Jews. For examples of this, see Bar. 1:11-12; 1 Macc. 7:33; 1 Esd. 6:31; Philo, *Gaius*, 280; and in rabbinic Judaism, *m. 'Abot* 3:2.

which is so that the church might “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.” The motivation for this desire has been variously assigned by scholars. Dibelius and Conzelmann have argued that this desire reflects the emerging “burgeois” aspirations of Christians in light of waning expectations of an imminent eschaton, reflecting the goal of “building the possibility of life in this world,” for which stable government is seen as beneficial.³² Schwarz disagrees, seeing not a motivation wrought of disappointment and compromise, but a genuinely Pauline desire to maintain the distinctiveness of the church in society by eliminating false teaching.³³ Richards sees here a nervousness concerning governmental authority in a context in which the church desires to profess political loyalty while reserving ultimate loyalty for God.³⁴ Towner argues that we see here a commitment to the values of Roman society as a “proactive stance” to prepare to engage the society evangelistically.³⁵ Common to most of these positions is the idea that, as Dunn puts it, “good government is for the benefit of all, and that is why those in authority are to be prayed for.”³⁶ But perhaps we might determine which of these views most closely encapsulates Paul’s motivation in the passage.

The vocabulary of v. 2 is of interest in addressing this matter. The terms “quiet” (*hêremos*) and “peaceable” (*hêsuchios*) are virtually synonymous and together indicate a state in which the church might carry on its life unaccosted, as the context of v. 1 shows, by government authorities who have the power to disrupt the life of the church.³⁷ “Godliness” (*eusebeia*) and “dignity” (*semnotês*) cast the ethos of the Christian move-

³²M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 39.

³³R. Schwarz, *Bürgerliches Christentum in Neuen Testament?* (Klosterneuberg: Verlag Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 156, 158.

³⁴Richards, *Difference and Distance*, 153.

³⁵P. Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction* (JSNTSup 34; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 15. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 421. Marshall further states, “The author of the P[astoral] E[pistles] continues to view the church’s responsibility towards the world to be to make a redemptive impression in it” (442).

³⁶Dunn, *1 Timothy*, 797. Similarly, Richards (*Difference and Distance*, 153) asserts that the motive is “[to make] clear to authorities that the movement (and God) wants good for all.” Dunn vividly says Paul is concerned to show that the Christianity is not an “anarchist movement,” but is concerned for society (797).

³⁷Cf. BDAG, 439, 440-441.

ment in complementary terms. “Godliness” is a predominant concern in the Pastoral Epistles³⁸ and indicates obligation to God, while “dignity” indicates that a “well-ordered religious life carries with it and commands respect within the wider society.”³⁹ The collection of this terminology shows Paul’s concern that life within the church reflect well on the church for the sake of its public acceptance and reputation.⁴⁰

Why this concern? This is spelled out in vv. 3-6 in terms of God’s program to bring salvation to the world. The call to prayer and the desire for a life that finds public acceptance is deemed pleasing to God, who is characterized as “Savior” (v. 3). God the Savior wants “all” to be saved⁴¹ and to come to the knowledge of the truth (v. 4). In what is widely seen as a creedal fragment that provides a Christian reworking of the Jewish *Shema* (vv. 5-6), the man Christ Jesus is identified as the one who gave himself as a ransom for “all” and who is thus the mediator between the one Savior God and humankind. In v. 7 Paul concludes the section by identifying himself as the herald, apostle, and teacher of Gentiles, one who bears the news of this Savior God to those in the Roman world.

So the structure of 2:1-7 really proceeds in two parts. First, Christians are to pray for everyone, including governmental authorities, so that the church can live a life pleasing to God and acceptable to the larger society. Second, this tack is approved by God because it is integral to the saving mission of God in the world, a mission to which Paul himself is

³⁸The term occurs ten times (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1). The adverb *eusebôs* occurs twice (2 Tim. 3:12; Titus 2:12). There has been some scholarly discussion about whether *eusebeia* reflects more of its Hellenistic background and thus describes conforming to Roman family values, especially devotion to one’s household (so M. R. D’Angelo, “Eusebeia: Roman Imperial Family Values and the Sexual Politics of 4 Maccabees and the Pastorals,” *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003): 139-65). For the view that it refers to godliness in a Jewish-Christian sense, see J. J. Wainwright, “Eusebeia: Syncretism or Conservative Contextualization?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 65 (1993): 211-224.

³⁹Dunn, *1 Timothy*, 798. Cf. BDAG 412-13, 919.

⁴⁰So Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 423.

⁴¹L. T. Johnson (*The First and Second Letters to Timothy* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 191) suggests that salvation in this context, while not excluding an eternal focus, refers more to the present location of unbelievers: “God wills all people to belong to the people God is forming in the world.”

fully dedicated. Moreover, a linguistic feature binds these two parts together. The word “all” (*pas*) occurs four times in the passage and links these two concerns as one piece. Prayer is made for “all” (v. 1), particularly “all” in authority (v. 2), because God wants “all” to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (v. 4), which is accomplished through Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for “all” (v. 6). This universalistic thread⁴² serves to summon the church to look beyond itself to the world, for the church is the agency through which God brings the message of salvation to the world.⁴³ Paul’s mention of himself as sent to the “Gentiles” implies this universal scope of salvation as well (v. 7).

Does this passage provide programmatic control over the letter? As we have seen, much of the letter does seem concerned to frame the understanding of the church in terms of a household, and much of the discussion casts the required behavior of church members in terms of the Roman household structure. We have also seen markers in the text that indicate that this conformity has as motivation, at least in part, the desire to put the church in a positive light in the eyes of Roman society. The placement of 2:1-7, with its voiced desire for the church to lead lives pleasing to God and acceptable in society, prior to a series of exhortations encouraging conformity with the larger social view of familial relations, suggests that such conformity is one way, prayer being another, to attain the “quiet and peaceable life” mentioned in 2:2. The connection between this “quiet and peaceable life” and God’s desire that all be saved then suggests that the call to conform to Roman family norms has an evangelistic motivation.⁴⁴

⁴²Some see this usage of “all” to refer to all individual human beings (e.g., Dunn, *1 Timothy*, 797). Others see it referring not to individuals but to all “kinds” or “categories” of human beings (e.g., Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 113-124). This discrepancy seems to owe itself in large measure to the historic debate between Calvinists and Arminians. In 1 Timothy resolution of this problem seems beyond the concern of the author. “All” simply functions to describe the scope of God’s saving program to include the world beyond the church.

⁴³This seems in part to be the concern of 3:15-16. The church is the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (v. 15), and the content of this truth is contained in the hymnic fragment of v. 16.

⁴⁴Titus 3:1-2 has a similar focus as 1 Tim. 2:1-2. In Titus the call is to be obedient to civil authorities and to be polite to “all.” This call comes before 3:3-8, in which the saving mercy of God is described.

A Contemporary Thought Experiment: Social Accommodation and Women in Ministry

The troublesome passage 1 Tim 2:9-15, particularly vv. 11-12, has produced no shortage of discussion, often creating more heat than light. Whether to treat the passage as a universal mandate for all places and times or to treat it as a socially determined bit of paranaesis has generated a voluminous literature, both popular and scholarly. Scholarly discussions appeal to exegetical,⁴⁵ historical-cultural,⁴⁶ literary/intertextual,⁴⁷ and epistolary⁴⁸ grounds to argue their viewpoints. The broad diversity of opinion as to both the original meaning of the passage as well as its contemporary application is largely based on the conviction by many that as Scripture it must continue to speak to the faithful beyond its immediate context.⁴⁹ And as Wesleyans, this is especially pertinent, for many denominations within our tradition openly advocate the ordination of women for ministry in the church, in the view of others in direct violation of this passage.

Clearly, Wesleyans and others find a way to maintain their belief in spite of the so-called “plain meaning” of the text, often by appeal to the differences between the setting of the original text and the setting of the contemporary world. So, does our discussion offer us a way to apply this passage to our world while maintaining the role of the text as sacred scripture in such a way that affirms our conviction that God calls women to active ministry in the church? The way forward is in terms of a thought experiment on this passage in light of the assertions of our discussion.

Let us begin with a recollection of a relatively recent news story regarding a press release emerging from the annual convention of a major evangelical denomination. This affirmation, drawing on 1 Tim 2:9-15 for justification, affirmed not only that denomination’s longstanding prohibi-

⁴⁵E.g., H. Baldwin, A. J. Köstenberger, and T. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

⁴⁶E.g., R. C. Kroeger and C. C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

⁴⁷E.g., Wall, “1 Timothy 2:9-15.” Similarly, Quinn (“Paraenesis and the Pastoral Epistles,” *Semeia* 50 (1990):199-201) suggests that 2:11-15 might reflect a marriage liturgy that reinforced the domestic role of women.

⁴⁸E.g., Richards, *Difference and Distance*, 153-154.

⁴⁹Wall, “1 Timothy 2:9-15,” 99-103. A similar concern is voiced by J. Y. Thériault, “La femme chrétienne dans les textes pauliniens,” *Science et Esprit* 37 (1985): 297-317.

tion of women from ordained ministry, but also the priority of the domestic role of women in the home and out of the workplace. Once this press release hit the airwaves, the response of many women, many of whom had no vested interest in the workings of the church, was sharply critical of the statement, so much so that the denomination had to send out a clarification of their position. The conviction of this group had spawned an outcry that caused it great embarrassment, and perhaps hindered its capacity to present the gospel witness to those offended. Clearly, this position reflects the deeply held religious convictions of the group. But does our assessment of the situation of 1 Timothy provide another avenue to remain faithful to the testimony of Scripture while keeping open channels for evangelistic witness?

Let us assume that our basic assessment of the situation of 1 Timothy is correct, namely, that its instruction is concerned with guiding the church to live in accord with social conventions regarding the place of the household in Roman society so as to keep the church and its message free from disrepute, to the end that the gospel may reach that society evangelistically. So let us pose a question: what is it to be “biblical” in our understanding of this text? Is it to parrot the text verbatim as a proposition for all time, or is it to discern the “principle” that gives rise to the specific expression seen in 1 Tim. 2:9-15? Many do choose the former option. However, this discussion has argued that, to understand much of 1 Timothy, one must understand the social setting of the letter. It may be that fidelity to the biblical text here means to dig below the wording of the text to get at the principle behind the text. Once discovered, the principle is then applied to a different social setting, which may result in a different specific expression of the principle.

How might that look today? Given the conclusion of our study of 1 Timothy and the lesson of the aforementioned press release, it may go something like this. One of the foci of 1 Timothy is to live according to social norms to secure a favorable hearing for the gospel. In that setting, women’s public roles were severely restricted, and 1 Tim. 2:9-15 simply reflects the ecclesiastical analogue and accommodation to the social convention. So what is the social convention in early twenty-first-century American society? It is that women are largely permitted and encouraged to seek roles that were once considered the domain of men only. So how would the principle illustrated in 1 Timothy find specific expression in this context? It would be in words that would contradict the specific wording found in 1 Tim. 2. We might imagine Paul saying something like this: “I not only permit, but encourage women to teach and to be in authority, even

over men. This is in keeping with what goes on in your social world. Go ahead, fulfill your role in society, for you will be saved in doing this.” He might even appeal to the biblical story of Deborah and Barak as scriptural warrant for his exhortation. In short, if we go the route of preferring principle over specific expression, to be “biblical” in our understanding of 1 Tim. 2:9-15 may mean going against the actual words of 1 Tim. 2:9-15.

Of course, this is essentially a hermeneutical issue, and as such, would require a lot more hard work than is evidenced in this little thought experiment. A legitimate concern would be to ensure that biblical interpretation does not become an arbitrary free-for-all in circumventing the biblical texts themselves. But if there is any merit to this study at all, then it suggests that interpreters must do more than simply repeat verbatim biblical texts as propositional bullets to shoot down disconcerting viewpoints.⁵⁰

Conclusion

This study set out to determine the reasons for the nature of some of the exhortations in 1 Timothy. We have seen that understanding the contents of the letter against the backdrop of Roman society, particularly the importance of the household in society, helps to explain some of the specific paraenesis that has given rise to differences of opinion among interpreters. If there is anything to be gleaned from this study, it may be that Christian individuals and groups in our own day must be cognizant of our social settings in order to determine when conformity to social norms would not compromise our core values, and thus provide for a more friendly hearing of the gospel in the social arena. In this we may rehabilitate another phrase from the Bible, “friendship with the world,” into a more positive statement of our mission in the world.

⁵⁰This is in keeping with the model of biblical authority proposed by N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 139-143, in which he suggests that the Bible is a drama in five acts, the first four of which are completed within the Bible: creation, sin, Israel, and Jesus. The fifth act is begun with the writing of the Gospels and Epistles, but continues in the church’s engagement with both the biblical story and the world. The final act, then, is not simply parroting selected lines from the first four acts, but consists of a saturation with the biblical story such that the church is able to creatively articulate the sense of the story in words appropriate to its own historical context. A popular outworking of Wright’s model is found in C. G. Bartholomew and M. W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). In this vein, Johnson (*The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 211) suggests engaging the passage “in a dialectical process of criticism within the public discourse of the church.”

PAUL'S QUEST FOR A HOLY CHURCH: ROMANS 14:1—15:13

by

Robert Smith

The gift of hospitality is an expression of the Christian faith that enables the grace of God to be extended among all relationships within the Body of Christ when it functions with the grammar of love. Just as the reading of texts depends on mutually agreed rules of syntactic structure, so hospitality provides the internal structure within the church by which the edification of the Body takes place. Further, hospitality, as a gift of God, empowers the church of Jesus Christ to reach to those outside the Body of Christ who sense no immediate need to enter the environment where Christians worship and fellowship (cf. Rom. 12:13). More than an act of pre-evangelism (that is, those things Christians do to bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel), hospitality is a sacramental activity by which the grace of God becomes incarnate in human lives through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. Biblical hospitality finds a descriptive expression in Paul's commitment to the believers in Thessalonica when he says, "Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).¹

Hospitality, then, is part of God's great scheme by which the disciples of Jesus Christ proclaim the grace of God within the church and throughout the world by the ordinary course of their daily lives. John Wesley carried out his personal understanding of hospitality through the practice of "works of mercy." In his sermon "On Visiting the Sick," the founder of Methodism

¹All biblical quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible: Updated Edition* unless otherwise noted.

proclaimed that works of mercy were “essentially necessary, as to the continuance of that faith whereby we are already ‘saved by grace,’ so to the attainment of everlasting salvation.”² He saw these outward expressions of faith as a “real means of grace.”³ Matthew 25:34ff. provides Scriptural support for these vehicles of grace in any culture that distinguishes between those who have and those who do not. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus declared that “to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (v. 40).

In a Wesleyan context the practice of hospitality takes the Body of Christ beyond the familiar and the safe so that the people of God might serve those who have been pushed to the fragile edges of society where people exist only a step or two away from the kingdom of darkness. Wesley’s principle is made clear in his sermon “On Zeal:” The Christian should “show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy. . . . Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, ‘at charity’s almighty call’—when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether body or soul.”⁴ “Works of mercy” do not occur as a result of self-discipline alone. Rather, these acts are the fruit of “true Christian zeal” and describe the process by which we “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

The wider context of Christian theology directs our attention to the Trinity, to the fellowship and hospitality implicit within the interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵ When this relational model of the Trinity is coupled with the radical nature of the incarnation, we discover the theological underpinnings of hospitality as a means of grace. Within the Body of Christ, relationships become more than fellowship alone; reaching out to another becomes more than a helping hand. Luther addressed the relational nature of the Christian life when he said, “I will give myself as a sort of Christ to my neighbor as Christ gave him-

²Albert C. Outler (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3: *Sermons III*, 71-114, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 385.

³Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*.

⁴Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, 314.

⁵For a contemporary discussion of this Trinitarian idea, cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1996), esp. chapter 4, “The Trinitarian Mind,” 73-111.

self for me.”⁶ In this way, those who participate in the Body of Christ bear witness to the living presence of Jesus Christ in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hospitality and the People of God: An Old Testament Perspective

Paul's quest for a holy church originates in God's desire to create a people that will be for God “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). Israel's unique character as the people of God lay in God's call to Abraham and the divine promise that through him “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3b). Later Jewish tradition interpreted this promise in terms of light; Israel would be “a light to the nations [i.e., the Gentiles]” (Isa. 49:6). This promise, however, did not come without a price. Covenantal loyalty demanded that the people must live in obedience to the God of the covenant and in a state of hospitality with one another. Obedience to God meant living in obedience to the divine laws that were given to sustain stability within the community. The prophet Jeremiah addressed the problem of disobedience and identified the nature of Israel's sin as a failure to live in compliance with God's laws for Israel. His scathing words reveal the blatant disregard for the unity God wills for the children of Abraham, a unity that would reflect covenant loyalty among the elect of God.

Following the construction of the second temple in Jerusalem (dedicated in 515 BCE), the Children of Israel attempted to maintain their obedience to God by legalistic practices that would guarantee ritual purity within the community. The radical reforms established by Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13), the careful patterns for daily living established by the Pharisees, and the separation from temple worship and its defiled priesthood by the Essenes, demonstrate how various groups within Jewish tradition attempted to sustain covenant loyalty. The practices that began to identify the emerging sects within Judaism were built on their response to a single question: How do we, as the people of God, live in a world that has become defiled and under the domination of pagan political powers? Prior to Israel's exile in Babylon, Jeremiah had questioned how the people of God could expect to escape divine judgment when he asked,

⁶Quoted in Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950), 231. Bainton adds his interpretation to Luther's thought: “This is the word which ought to be placarded as the epitome of Luther's ethic, that the Christian must be a Christ to his neighbor” (231).

Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered!”—that you may do all these abominations (Jer. 7:9-10)?

The prophet knew that unity among the people could only be achieved as they lived in faithfulness to the divine covenant. Their actions, however, betrayed their lack of covenant loyalty and their profound misunderstanding of God’s covenant.

Into this world of sacred politics and Imperial occupation, Jesus came with a message that redefined the basic concerns of Israel. When asked to identify the greatest of the commandments, he took the opportunity to restate the first of the Ten Commandments by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [might]” (cf. Matt. 22:37). This ancient word allowed Jesus to remind Israel that their standing before God must be understood in terms of love. When Jesus referred to Israel’s traditional confession of faith (the “Shema”), he was doing more than prohibiting idolatry among the chosen people of God (the purpose of the first commandment). He was calling each person to a rigorous act of covenant loyalty before God. Covenant loyalty could no longer be defined in terms of idolatry alone. From this time forward, the “Great Commandment” would focus on a *practical* monotheism defined in terms of one’s commitment to God defined by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.⁷

Jesus did not stop his response to the question with a statement describing the nature of the vertical dimension of the divine-human encounter. He went on to describe the nature of the horizontal encounter between human persons. Addressing the expert in the law, he quoted words from Leviticus 19:18, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This text is located at the conclusion of a passage that explains how the people of God are to treat one another. The ability to love one’s neighbor grounded in how a person stands before God. Earlier in this chapter God instructs the people to “be holy” (Lev. 19:2). The command, then, is clarified in terms of a holy God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:16, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY”). Jesus taught that kingdom living can ignore neither God nor humanity; to do so is to be caught up in a world that draws lines where lines were not intended to be drawn.

⁷Paul expresses this commitment by an oxymoronic statement when he urges Christ-believers in Rome to become a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1).

An unavoidable question remains for those faithful Jews who equated the divine presence of God's salvation in terms of real politics. During the period of second temple Judaism, many people believed that divine activity would, sooner or later, bring political liberation to the children of Israel.⁸ At some point the exile would come to an end and the people of God would begin to live toward the promise of the messianic vision that had been developing through the message of the prophets during the critical days of the monarchy (cf. Isa. 2:2-4). While Jesus knew that his message of the kingdom of God would become a threat to the Roman Empire, the nature of this liberating activity involved more than political transformation. His message of the kingdom would break down barriers that had divided Jews from Gentiles; it would reestablish a people of God made up of all the nations of the earth who would dare to pick up their cross and follow Jesus, even to Golgatha (cf. Mark 8:34-9:1). More than the transformation of the political structures of the world, the message of Jesus offered humanity the ability to rest in him (cf. Matt. 11:27-30). Therefore, to be yoked to Christ means that one takes on the character of Christ.

Hospitality and the People of God: Paul's Quest for a Holy Church

Paul's ministry spans the gulf created by movement from "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) to the inception of the "coming age" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). God's salvation through Christ comes to a people longing for liberation, a people whose dreams for the future are caught up in the politics of nationalism.⁹ Paul, then, faced the challenge of interpreting the divine

⁸Cf. Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism*, 2d ed. (London: SPCK, 2002), who concluded that "[t]he first century CE saw a considerable increase in the yearning for deliverance of the people of God, such as were told in the Scriptures" (97).

⁹Cf. N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), who states that Paul's "theology has the character of inaugurated eschatology, that is, of a sense that God's ultimate future has come forwards into the middle of history, so that the church is living within—indeed, is constituted precisely by living simultaneously within!—God's new world and the present one. The age to come has already arrived with Jesus; but it will be consummated in the future. The church must order its life and witness, its holiness and love, along that axis" (57).

promises given to Israel and its desire for nationalistic liberation through his encounter with the risen Christ. How will the people of God be defined according to his apostolic perspective? The answer to this question leads through two significant Pauline texts, Rom. 11:17-24 and Rom. 13:8-10.

Romans 11:17-24. Paul's analogy of the olive tree, coming toward the end of chapters 9-11, alerts his listener/reader to the unity of all humanity in the grand scheme of the divine plan of salvation. Prior to the analogy, Paul declares that "if the root is holy, the branches are too" (v. 16b). Clearly, the issue is neither the credibility of the root nor the tree. Rather, attention is focused on the branches, and the quality of these branches as they derive their life from the richness of the root. Further, the branches are placed in two different categories, the natural branches and the branches of a wild olive shoot. The point of the analogy is that the nature of the root holds these very different branches together within the constraints of the olive tree itself. The logic of Paul's thought runs like this: The tree (i.e., Israel) is the fruit of one holy root and two different sets of branches. The Apostle does not ignore the differences between the branches, but these differences no longer separate Jews from Gentiles, nor do they disqualify the Gentiles from becoming part of the people of God. Their unity is assured because they both draw their nourishment from the "rich root of the olive tree" (v. 17b). To those who are "in Christ" this means that unity is not achieved through a political plan that promotes the equality of all humanity. No, it is a theological unity grounded in the nature of God, and it is the holy root that supports the branches whether they are natural or grafted into the tree. When the gulf between Jew and Gentile is overcome, the possibility exists for God to have one people, a people supported by a common root.

Following his analogy of the olive tree, Paul discloses the key to understanding its purpose. Harkening back to the theme of the letter in Rom. 1:16-17, he refers simply to "faith." Speaking of the "natural branches" (v. 23, i.e., the Jews) that have been cut off (i.e., they no longer draw nourishment from the holy root), he is confident that "if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in" (v. 23). The paradox of the one tree and the unity it provides for natural and unnatural branches continues, but now Paul focuses on the natural branches that have been

cut off.¹⁰ The good news is that they are able to be “grafted in” because “God is able to graft them in again” (v. 23). Here is the story of God’s grace that transcends ethnic boundaries and affords unity for Jews and Gentiles in the church; it is a unity found in the character of a holy God who desires a holy people. The health of the tree is a reflection of the quality of the root. In Paul’s mind the people within the church (i.e., the branches of the tree) grow strong because of the quality of the root.¹¹

Romans 13:8-10. Paul’s expression of the “Love Commandment” is fundamental to his gospel message. These three verses establish the profound role love plays in his proclamation of the story of God as it continues in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The text declares that love is the only commodity that can be owed to another within the people of God. Paul does not define love (*agapē*) in his letter to Rome, but he uses it to speak of the revelation of God’s activity toward weak and sinful humanity through the death of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 5:6-8).¹² The Apostle speaks of a God who steps away from the powerful structures of the political realities of Caesar and the Empire and moves toward the edges of life where the marginalized of society live in desperation. Paul knew that desperation would be overcome far more effectively by love than by restructuring the political and economic structures of society. The love Paul had in mind has the power to bring believers together as the people of God, for the only debt a Christian has is “to love one another” (Rom. 13:8).

¹⁰Some commentators believe that Paul does not understand the grafting process. His concern, however, is not horticulture. The logic of the analogy depends on a God who is able to do that which seems otherwise unnatural and impossible. For a recent discussion on this passage, see Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, ANTC, ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), esp. 271-77.

¹¹Here the unity between Jews and Gentiles is complete. They share the nourishment of the same “holy root.” Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993). He contends that “God himself has sanctified the root by his gracious election of it as his own” (614). Further, the root represents “the patriarchs, especially Abraham” (614) and Jews and Gentiles “find life in the vital parent stock of Abraham and the patriarchs” (616).

¹²Cf. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), who defines *love* as the “Great Positive Possibility.” He says that “human conduct is positively ethical when it is not *conformed to this world* (12:2), when, within the framework of this world and in complete secrecy, it bears witness to the strangeness of God” (492f.).

Writing from Corinth, Paul knew the power of love to edify (i.e., to build up) the Body of Christ (Rom. 14:19; cf. also 1 Cor. 14:17). Love expressed toward others could accomplish that which spiritual gifts could never achieve by themselves. The gifts tended to turn inward and create a proud individual who cares only about personal concerns. Love, on the other hand, is identified as the “still more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31b) because through it the people of God would become an authentic expression of the character of God. Transcending ethnic boundaries and the purity of one’s blood line, divine love empowers anyone who is in Christ Jesus to be a “living and holy sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1), for this same love took Jesus to the cross.¹³ Nevertheless, it is the role of the Holy Spirit that allows one who sees the crucified Jesus to recognize that he is the “Christ.” Paul knows that no one can say “Jesus is Lord” apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1-3). Failure to recognize who Jesus is because of his humanity is a failure to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit within the people of God. Paul’s quest for a holy church cannot be achieved apart from divine revelation that directs the congregation to the paradox of the crucified Christ and the cruciform lives of those who are “in Christ.”¹⁴

Romans 13:8-10 makes clear, once and for all, that human attempts to fulfill the law have lost their meaning because “love is the fulfillment of *the law*” (v. 10). The one who loves the neighbor will neither commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet. Once love is redefined by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the people of God can no longer rest in what they choose to avoid, thinking they can please God by separating themselves from the Body. “In Christ” the people of God are engaged in a life of love, and the purpose of love is to promote unity and edification within the Body of Christ.¹⁵ Love, then, creates unity and edifies the Body (1 Cor. 8:1d).

¹³Cf. Barth, *Romans*, who says, “Inasmuch as we love one another we cannot wish to uphold the present order as such, for by love we do the ‘new’ by which the ‘old’ is overthrown” (493).

¹⁴For a significant discussion of the “cruciform life,” cf. Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001). See esp. chapters 8-10, “Cruciform Love” (155-267).

¹⁵Cf. Ben Witherington, III, with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). Witherington and Hyatt say, “Indeed, love is, in a sense, a Law unto itself, for it goes well beyond the avoidance of doing harm, or even respecting and helping the neighbor” (317).

Romans 14:1-15:13. Recently, Mark Nanos has set the agenda for the study of this practical section of Romans.¹⁶ He contends that Paul is addressing the problem created by the presence of Jews and Gentiles within the congregations in Rome. The reading of the letter presented here is able to sidestep Nanos' contention by noting that this issue has been addressed, and solved, in Paul's analogy of the olive tree in 11:17-24. Now, beginning in Rom. 14:1, the Apostle turns his focus to the practices taking place among the Roman Christ-believers that are creating division within the congregation.¹⁷

In the Greek text of 14:1, Paul emphasizes the place of the "weak in faith" within the congregation.¹⁸ As the passage begins, the Apostle has not defined what it means to be "weak," because the issue is not the means by which one is able to point out "the one who is weak" within the Body of Christ. His concern is to make sure that the weak one is received into the congregation. Weakness is no excuse for exclusion from the people of God¹⁹ Paul discovers a holy church through the act of including

¹⁶Mark D. Nanos, *the Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996). See esp. chapter 3, "Who Were the 'Weak' and the 'Strong' in Rome?" 85-165.

¹⁷Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC 38B, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publishers, 1988), who interprets this passages as part of Paul's "attempt to redefine the people of God" (797). This passage demonstrates how the gospel works in a "real world" setting, the church.

¹⁸The following paraphrase attempts to capture the logic of Paul's thought: *Now the one who does not understand the freedom possible "in Christ," receive to yourselves.* "Faith," here, provides the foundation for new life "in Christ." The life of faith is a reflection of how the believer perceives what has taken place in God's work through Jesus Christ.

¹⁹Cf. Reidar Aasgaard, "My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" *Christian Siblingship in Paul* (Early Christianity in Context; JSNTSup 265" London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 180-82, who states that "[i]n the hierarchical Roman society of the late Republic and early Empire social order was strictly fixed. Within, and also to some extent across, these social divisions there also was a distinction at work between 'weak' (*inferior*) and 'strong' (*potentior*), with a gradation of values according to strength. Prestige was awarded on the basis of degrees of physical strength, financial wealth, and authority (*auctoritas*). Ideas of honour and shame were very likely to be associated with it: the strong were in a position of honour; they were also called '*honestiores*.' Accordingly, the position of the weak, of the '*humiliores*,' was shameful. In Roman society the weak (*infirmiores*) were those that were vulnerable to the display of power from those socially above them."

even the weak within the congregation. This activity imitates the work of God within the congregation. In Rom. 14:1-4 Paul does not contrast the “weak” with the “strong.” Instead, he distinguishes between one who “eats everything” and another who “eats vegetables only” (v. 2). These categories indicate the basic concerns that controlled the dietary habits of the people of God who lived under the restrictions of the Mosaic law. Such distinctions have no place in those who are “in Christ” for “love is the fulfillment of *the* law” (13:10b). To destroy the unity of the people of God because of dietary concerns discloses a fundamental misunderstanding of life “in Christ.”

This apostolic view of love and the law finds support in Paul’s statement concerning God. Both groups are warned against activities that would wound the Body of Christ. Thus, vegetarians must not judge omnivores, and omnivores must not treat vegetarians with contempt. The next statement presents the foundation on which the command in verse 1 stands. Paul says, do this “for God has accepted him” (v. 3). Although this statement is grammatically ambiguous, its use of the verb “accepted” (*proselabeto*) points the listener/reader back to the opening command. Therefore, Paul calls those who have faith so that they “may eat all things” to a higher standard within the congregation. They are to accept (*welcome, receive, embrace*) the one who is weak in the faith and thereby imitate the work of God. God has accepted the one who is weak, so also those addressed in verse 1 are commanded to accept the one who is weak in the faith.

Paul’s words disclose an ecclesial principle that needed clarification in Rome. He contends that to be weak in the faith does not exclude one from full participation within the people of God. Paul confronts this situation because he knows that judging has the power to create disunity within the Body of Christ.²⁰ Paul’s quest for a holy church is at issue in his struggle to promote the unity of the people of God. The “servant” will

²⁰Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980). Käsemann notes that “[f]rom the beginnings of church history there has been a struggle between the slogans of total obedience and Christian freedom. This leads to a genuine theological conflict, which in different forms caused trouble for every Christian generation and constantly led to the formation of groups within Christianity. Thus, what takes place at Rome serves as an example and it is no accident that it occurs where Jewish and Gentile Christians meet” (368-69).

be judged, but proper judgment comes from the “master” (*kyrios*, the lord) of the servant. When a brother or sister judges the religious practices of another brother or sister they stand on the brink of destroying the unity of the body, especially when these practices possess no theological consequence within God’s scheme of salvation for humanity. What one eats or drinks has no eternal consequence for believers because Paul’s christological interpretation of the law has stripped such thinking of any salvific value.

In verse 5 Paul shifts his argument from eating and drinking to the consideration of holy days. The Sabbath is not mentioned specifically, but it appears to be in the Apostle’s mind as he continues his quest for a holy church. The expression of gratitude becomes the focus of his attention as he takes on the problem of what it means to confess that “we are the Lord’s” (v. 8b). The vegetarian and the omnivore, the sabbatarian and the non-sabbatarian alike, find unity in the fact that they “give thanks to God” (v. 6). What is more, this life of thanksgiving originates in a proper understanding of life itself. Paul declares that “not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself” (v. 7). Then he notes that,

If we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (vv. 8-9).

Under Torah, the unity of the people of God grew out of covenant loyalty. Now, with the coming of Jesus Christ “apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God (i.e., God’s salvific activity) has been manifested” (Rom 3:21). Further, this righteousness of God comes “through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe” (Rom. 3:22). No one need be excluded from the grace of God because Jews and Gentiles stand on equal footing; there is no “difference” between them (Rom. 3:23). From Paul’s perspective, Jesus Christ is Lord of all, the living and the dead, and his Lordship allows Jews and Gentiles to find a common life “in Christ.” Paul’s theological assessment of life in the “new age” clarifies any possible misconception about the scope of Christ’s Lordship:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:28-29).

Paul's call in Romans 14 for the unity of the church is not unique to his argument presented here. Rather, this call is a functional part of his larger theological vision that has been shaped by God's revelation of Christ "in him" (cf. Gal. 1:16). This revelation enabled Paul to adapt second temple Jewish apocalyptic motifs such as the "present age" and the "coming age" into his emerging christology. In Paul's two-age theology, unity is the apostolic norm for life in the "coming age."²¹ While unity is not impossible during the "present age," it only occurs as the result of heroic effort exerted by the members of a community or it is imposed by oppressive political action. Unity is not the norm for life in the "present age," for individuals too often choose to live for themselves. Life "in Christ" does not allow this self-centered way of life. The Apostle proclaims that "not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself" (Rom. 14:7).²² As Christ-believers share a common goal, living and dying for the Lord (Rom. 14:9), so this goal prohibits judging others from a self-centered perspective that would force others to live according to norms appropriate only to life in the "present age." The transfer from the "present age" to the "coming age" is possible because "Christ died and lived again" (Rom. 14:9). Paul concludes this section by declaring that "each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (v. 12), that is, each one will express how the christological concerns of the "new age" have shaped their lives.

The content of the next paragraph of this section (Rom. 14:13-23) revolves around Paul's statement concerning the "kingdom of God."²³

²¹Cf. Käsemann, *Romans*, who remarks that "[i]n practice the theological problem of the relation between complete obedience and genuine freedom becomes the problem of the relation between faith and world view. Only theoretically can the two be soberly differentiated. In reality they constantly overlap" (369).

²²Cf. N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), who adds that "everything Christians do is done, not in relation to themselves alone, but in relation to the Lord. To 'live to oneself,' the position Paul rules out in v. 7, is to order one's life simply to one's own background, culture, desires, and wishes; these may not be wrong in themselves, but everything must be judged in relation to the Lord himself" (737).

²³Cf. Wright, "Romans," who declares that Paul "is emphasizing that the kingdom to which those in Christ belong is a kingdom superior to, and destined to replace, that of Caesar" (739). The Apostle seems to repeat himself in order to emphasize his desire to clarify the spiritual and political boundaries of one's freedom "in Christ."

God's kingdom is not about eating and drinking; its focus is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Kingdom living moves away from external legalistic practices so that it might reclaim the internal work of the Spirit. This internal work of the Spirit does not give an individual the authority to separate from the Body of Christ. Rather, it provides the means by which the Body of Christ can exist without competition between its members. Humanity finds both divine and human approval when one "serves Christ" in this way (cf. v. 18).

At this point Paul demonstrates the unique character of new age living. Even though no food is "unclean in itself" (v. 14a), the one who is able to eat everything will set aside this new found freedom in Christ that a weaker brother may not be hurt (v. 14b). To go on eating in spite of the scruples of the one who is weak in the faith reflects the freedom of the "present age" not the freedom found "in Christ." The controlling principle of life in the "coming age" is built on acceptance of the apostolic command: "Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (v. 15). The one who is weak in the faith has received benefit from the death of Christ just as the one who eats everything. The problem raised by these differences in the community dare not be ignored. Paul recognizes that there are believers in the Body of Christ who have not yet come to terms with the freedom available "in Christ."²⁴ Further, he knows that those who exercise their freedom "in Christ" in the presence of the one who is weak may well force this one to eat by sheer intimidation. To maintain the integrity of the "weak" brother, Paul declares that "he who doubts is condemned if he eats" (v. 23).

The issue is "faith." The apostolic principle is not aimed against the weaker brother. Paul believes that it provides support for a position that might be taken lightly by those who are free "in Christ." Freedom in Christ during the time prior to the *parousia* is restricted freedom.²⁵ The danger of an unrestricted freedom is that it may take on the character of

²⁴Cf. Käsemann, *Romans*. He maintains that "Paul's point is that Christian freedom, which is bound to cause friction, should not be made questionable and the target of contempt by caprice or brotherly conflict. This would be a disavowal of the grace of God" (377).

²⁵Cf. Keck, *Romans*, who concludes that "[f]or the believer, it is not the law that finally identifies what is sin, but acting on a basis other than faith. Where one's life grows out of faith in God's mercies, there is freedom for scrupulous observance and for nonobservance as well" (348).

idolatry and thereby betray the work of Christ in the church. To do so is to disregard the unity of the Body of Christ for the sake of individual freedom, an act that reflects the spirit of the “present age.” Freedom in Christ, when exercised in a thoughtless manner, becomes a source of division among the people of God. This, in turn, misses the apostolic insight that moves God’s people to “pursue the things which make for peace and the building up (i.e., the edifying) of one another” (v. 19).

Romans 15:1 continues Paul’s thought about the actions that separate the one who eats everything from the one who eats only vegetables.²⁶ For the first time in this section the Apostle identifies those who have claimed their freedom “in Christ” as the “strong” (*hoi dynatoi*). Furthermore, he places himself among the “strong” in Rome. The apostolic directive states that “we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves” (v. 1). The weak are not merely those who observe dietary regulations and who hold certain days above others. The weak are “those without strength,” who are powerless at this point in their lives to take on the claims of the freedom offered to everyone who is “in Christ.” The “ought” placed on the “strong” lends support to the “weak” in their weakness.

Paul does not direct the “strong” to use rhetorical skill or the power of intimidation to challenge the weak to become strong. To do so would be an effort to “please” oneself, again, a strategy of the “present age” that proves that those who act in such a way fail to understand freedom “in Christ” from the perspective of the “coming age.” The goal of those who are part of the Body of Christ is to live in such a way that each one may “please his neighbor for his good, to his edification” (v. 2). The desire for an individual to be strong is never the desire to take advantage of another. Rather, the individual who is strong reaches out to the one who is weak so that the Body of Christ might be strengthened, not weakened. To please one’s self is to disregard the spiritual task of edifying one’s neighbor. Once again, the directive is grounded in the reading of an Old Testament text that takes seriously the place of Jesus Christ within the divine plan of God. Those who knew the Psalms would understand that,

²⁶While continuity does exist between chapter 14 and 15:1-7, cf. Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), notes that “the introduction of new vocabulary and new arguments suggests that 15:1 marks a new stage in the discussion” (865).

For your sake I have borne reproach;
 Dishonor has covered my face.
 I have become estranged from my brothers
 And an alien to my mother's sons.
 For zeal for Your house has consumed me,
 And the reproaches of those who reproach You
 have fallen on me (Psalm 69:7-9).

In its Jewish setting, the Psalm speaks of one (probably the psalmist) who “suffers the insults (or reproaches) of others, not because she or he is unfaithful but precisely because she or he is *faithful* (cf. Ps. 22:7-8).”²⁷

Paul uses this text to portray the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in spite of the abuse he encountered.²⁸ He took the unjust reproach upon himself and refused to please himself. Paul's christological interpretation of Psalm 69 becomes the pattern for the “strong” as they live within the structure of the Body of Christ. Regardless of what one might think of Paul's reading of the text, the implication is clear: If Christ was willing to suffer the injustice of those who would not accept his message, and if Christ refused to please himself, can those who have taken on new life “in Christ” chose any other pattern of behavior? Paul continues his argument by explaining the role of the Old Testament in the “coming age.” He believes that “whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (v. 4). Proper instruction leads to a pattern of life grounded in Christ that creates “hope” within those who live according to the pattern of Christ. The paragraph closes with a typical apostolic prayer for unity in verse 5: “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.” When the “weak” and the “strong” within the Body of Christ have “the same mind according to Christ Jesus,” they are able to glorify the God and Father of the Lord Jesus

²⁷J. Clinton McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 952.

²⁸Cf. Wright, “Romans,” adds that Paul assumes “that his readers are familiar with the basic story of Jesus, perhaps with oral traditions of such scenes as Gethsemane in which the Messiah shrank from his fate (Mark 14:32-42 and pars.; see also John 12:27; Heb. 5:7-9; Rom. 15:3 may also be illuminated by Phil. 2:6-8, which, if not written by Paul, is certainly endorsed by him; and 2 Cor. 8:9)” (745).

Christ “with one voice” (v. 6).²⁹ Paul’s point is that God cannot be glorified by a series of voices that cry out from the Body of Christ.

The final paragraph of this section (Rom. 15:7-13) points the listener/reader back to Rom. 14:1. Paul says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” In Rom. 14:3, Paul related the acceptance of the one who is weak to a work that reflects what God has done. Now he promotes mutual acceptance within the Body of Christ to the work that Christ accomplished when he accepted “us” (i.e., the “strong”). He adds that, when this mutual acceptance takes place, glory is extended to God, and what could be more fulfilling to members of the Body of Christ than to honor God with an act of unity!³⁰

The apostolic command in verse 7 is followed by Paul’s reiteration of unity between Jews and Gentiles as they live together within the Body of Christ. Its purpose is to properly conclude Paul’s gospel that cannot be understood as the transformation of an individual life before God as an isolated event. The gospel of God that Paul has faithfully proclaimed “from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum” (Rom. 15:19b) has the power to breakdown the boundaries that force designated groups, especially Jews and Gentiles, to live in isolation from one another. Paul declares that the Gentiles have been included within the story of God that began with the call of Abraham and continued through the history of Israel. Without the unity promoted by the gospel of God, the gospel is of no effect.

Conclusion: Paul’s Quest for a Holy Church: A Matter of Hospitality

We have now come full circle as we consider the relationship between hospitality and a holy church. Paul’s quest is, essentially, a quest

²⁹“With one voice” is a paraphrase of the Greek text that reads “with one mouth” (*en heni stomata*). The significance of the “mouth” in this text indicates that it is the means of giving voice to the body, that is, the Body of Christ here. In order to do this, the various members of the Body of Christ must be joined together in a unity that enables them to speak together “with one voice” so that God may be glorified by the people of God.

³⁰Witherington, *Romans*, commenting on the final words in v. 7 (“for the glory of God”) adds that “[u]nifying conduct is doxological by its very nature, and it reflects the character of God, who is patient and merciful” (343). I would add that this God is also “holy.”

for unity within the Body of Christ. For Paul, unity within the Body is a faithful expression of how the people of God carry out the gift of divine grace that has transformed their lives. A holy church does not result from a group of individuals whose focus is on personal wholeness. No, a holy church is the expression of a group of individuals “in Christ” who have set aside personal concerns for the sake of the corporate Body of Christ. Near the beginning of the final major section of his letter to the Romans (Rom. 12:1-1:13), Paul reveals how the gospel shapes the lives of those who are “in Christ.” He states that “through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think” (12:3). Apart from a clear response to such an admonition, the quest for a holy church will end in disappointment. Furthermore, the issues raised in Rom. 14:1-15:13, when read in light of John Wesley’s “works of mercy,” become a faithful expression of how women and men alike respond to the divine call to be holy. It is a matter of holy hospitality.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND THE WORLD: HOW FAR FROM OXFORD TO HOLLYWOOD?

by

Charles W. Christian

The two locales in this article's title (Oxford and Hollywood) are meant to evoke two images, one of John Wesley, Oxford don, and the other of all theater arts, both classical and popular, that have come to be associated with Hollywood. To twentieth-century "evangelicals," not to be equated only with conservatives of the Reformed tradition, Hollywood became more than a locale. It became the symbol of a "spiritual domain," a dark wasteland of iniquity, the devil's communication headquarters spewing forth vile propaganda into an unsuspecting world that needed very little encouragement toward wickedness to begin with.¹

This view of Hollywood springs from early Evangelical skepticism, found in Wesley and his colleagues, regarding the arts—the dramatic arts in particular, with its human-centered focus. Consistently under particular scrutiny were the theater, dance, and various musical forms arising in the eighteenth century (filled with contrapuntal forms).²

This article will focus on the movies and the consistently strained relationship that has existed between evangelicals (notably, but certainly not limited to Wesleyan evangelicals) and this visual medium, both in its

¹See especially the fiery condemnation of the "Hollywood mind set" that was "gripping the nation" with the rise of motion pictures in the 1930s and 1940s, in U. E. Harding, *Movie Mad America* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1942), especially chapter 2.

²Specific places where Wesley critiqued these art forms will be shown below.

embryonic form (the popular theater) and in its current incarnation in movie theaters everywhere.

The material for this history will begin with Wesley and focus on Wesleyan groups, with the Church of the Nazarene representing a microcosm of Conservative Evangelical groups. It will also include broader evangelical and non-evangelical Christian expressions in regard to the dramatic arts. Non-evangelical Christian paradigms will be treated briefly, but their role is crucial, since in many ways these voices have offered approaches that at times have guided evangelicals of the past, and (I propose) can continue to guide evangelicals in the future toward a more healthy and balanced approach to the relation of Christian faith and drama/movies, as well as other artistic endeavors.

As we discuss the history of the encounter between evangelicals and the movies, we will also examine the new era that now has emerged in the relationship between drama, motion pictures, and evangelicals. This new era, which has seen the greatest acceptance and even embrace of dramatic arts in the history of evangelicalism, holds potential for both danger and promise in regard to telling the story of God to our world. The potential dangers and promise of the new developments in this often-strained relationship will be explored in the conclusion.

Drama, Wesleyans, and Evangelicals in the Early Days

The friendship between evangelical Christians and the arts, especially the dramatic arts, has been strained at best over the years, and we come by it honestly. John Wesley was more than cautious in regard to such things as dancing, music, and drama. In his commentary on James 4:4, which warns that “friendship with the world is enmity toward God,” Wesley reminds us that the one who seeks the world for his or her happiness and pleasure comes dangerously close to earning the title “adulterer or adulteress.”³

For many in the Wesleyan tradition, along with those in the broader traditions of evangelicalism, attaining happiness from the world did not simply involve the coveting of material possessions, but also participating in worldly entertainments found in the fine arts and the popular arts.

As evangelical philosopher John P. Newport has pointed out, “in the Christian tradition, there has long been a suspicion of the artist and his [or

³John Wesley, *Commentary on the New Testament*, James 4:4.

her] work.”⁴ In the eighteenth century and beyond, artists became less and less concerned with service to the church, and the subject matter of the arts became more “worldly” and less ethereal. The themes being played out in the dramatic circles of Wesley’s day showed little concern for religious content, and in fact were largely aimed at making fun of religion and its restraints upon creativity and living in general.

In artistic creation, whether popular or classical, the view of the creative artist as “godlike” produced an aesthetic which valued creativity itself over any extraneous judgement regarding content.⁵ These factors played a key role in early and later evangelical skepticism regarding the arts in general and dramatic arts in particular. It is no wonder that Wesley, in a letter to the mayor of Bristol in 1764, wrote that the proposed playhouse would not only “sap the foundation of all religion” from the city, but would also “efface all traces of piety and seriousness” from the working men of the city, making the proposed playhouse harmful both spiritually and economically.⁶ In a journal entry in 1764, Wesley, speaking of a playhouse in Birmingham that had been converted into a chapel where he preached, wrote: “Happy would it be if all the playhouses in the kingdom were converted to so good [a] use.”⁷

Evangelical pioneer and Wesley colleague George Whitefield, whose training as an actor in his teens likely contributed to the development of his animated preaching style and booming vocal projection, likewise spoke often against theaters and the “dramatic arts.”⁸ Although Whitefield biographer John Pollock notes Whitefield’s early love for the stage, he reminds readers that in Whitefield’s (and Wesley’s) day, “No self-respecting mother in early Hanoverian Gloucester would let her son be an actor. . . .”⁹ The dramatic arts, like dance and various forms of music, were dangerous, according to Wesley and our other evangelical

⁴John P. Newport, *Christianity and Contemporary Art Forms* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979), 7.

⁵Ibid., 16-17.

⁶John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 12:128. Hereafter referred to as *Works*.

⁷*Works*, 3:161.

⁸See John Pollock, *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 5.

⁹Ibid.

forbears, not just because of their content, but because they became touted as an end in themselves and indeed were “competitors” with the pursuit of vital Christian piety.

“Modern music,” Wesley lamented in one journal entry, lacks the “true and ancient artistry” which depended upon “nature and mathematical principles” it once had, “the present masters having no fixed principles at all.”¹⁰ Furthermore, sounding like protestors in the current evangelical “worship wars,” Wesley laments in another journal entry about “two things in modern pieces of music which I could never reconcile to common sense.” The first was “singing the same words ten times over”; the other was “singing different words by different persons, at one and the same time.”¹¹ The contrapuntal forms developing in instrumental and vocal music in Wesley’s analysis seemed to stray beyond the preferred forms of music and place too much emphasis on the performer and even the composer, rather than the One who is the author of all that should be called lovely.¹² Dance, likewise according to Wesley, is to be avoided by all who are seeking to be truly Christian, since (as a letter written in 1784 declares), it “leads to numberless evils.”¹³

These artistic expressions were not only competitors with the notions of vital piety, but also were competitors with the proclaimers of such piety themselves in the realm of ideas. They were the kinds of pursuits indirectly referred to in one of Wesley’s sermons (based upon Matthew 16:26) as “pleasures of the world” which result in the loss of both present and future “pleasures of religion” found in a relationship with the Living God.¹⁴

\ Much of the nineteenth-century revivalistic tradition took its cues from Wesley and his colleagues in regard to contemporary art forms, most notably drama (and later the cinema). Revivalist Charles Finney once referred to dramatists and actors of his day as “a host of triflers and blasphemers of God.”¹⁵ However, although Wesley may have given support

¹⁰*Works*, 2:100-101.

¹¹*Works*, 3:160.

¹²See also *Works*, 13:470-473, for more on Wesley’s view of music.

¹³*Works*, 13:39. See also 7:34. This sounds a great deal like provisions against dancing in all its forms in denominational disciplines such as the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*. See below.

¹⁴Cf., *Works*, 6:493-495, a sermon entitled, “The Important Question.”

¹⁵See E. William Muehl, “The Aesthetic Heresy,” in *Reflection* (November 1968), 1. See also John P. Newport, *Christianity and Contemporary Art Forms*, 15.

to the overall sentiments that accompanied these negative perceptions of the dramatic arts up into the twentieth century, it is evident that, with each passing generation, the analytical tools employed by Wesleyans and other first-generation Evangelicals diminished.

In other words, the sophistication with which a John or Charles Wesley, armed with their Oxford liberal arts educations, would have accosted the skill and content of a dramatic presentation of their day began to wane and turn into *ad hominem* attacks or simple caricatures of the arts scene that emerged in later years. Therefore, while the “distance” from Oxford to theoretical “Hollywood” (i.e., the dramatic arts) was always strained, it moved from being a neighbor analytically approached, examined, and rejected, to a distant and unseen “evil” never engaged, only summarily rejected.¹⁶

The Early Twentieth Century: Neither “In” Nor “Of” the World

In tracing the relationship between drama and evangelicalism, whether Wesleyan evangelicals or others, one consistently encounters the admonition of Jesus at the forefront of the relationship: be “in the world, but not of it” (cf. John 17:15-16). In response to the emergence of modern liberalism (some of whom, like Walter Rauschenbusch, called themselves “evangelical liberals”), evangelicalism sought an intentional separation from what they deemed “worldliness.” Roger Olsen points to a watershed time in the 1940s and 1950s when conservative Christian groups split over the idea of “biblical separation” (where the Christian believer sees him/herself as totally separate from the world and its culture) versus “secondary separation” (an attempt to engage the culture and needs of the world without becoming too immersed in its ways).¹⁷

¹⁶One need only compare Wesley’s analysis of contrapuntal forms in music in opposition to those artists he favored (see *Works* 2:100-101), with twentieth-century evangelical attacks on modern music in the racist-sounding accusations that it “mirrors the hypnotic rhythms of the witch doctors found in actual recordings made in the darkest jungles of Africa” to see my point here. For an example of the often used “hypnotic jungle beat” argument by a Nazarene evangelist, see Chuck Millhuff, *You Asked For It; I Told It Like It Was* (Kansas City, MO: Pedestal Press, 1970), 44.

¹⁷Cf., Roger Olsen, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 593-594.

The separation of some evangelicals, who emerged as the modern fundamentalist movement, caused many to wonder whether they were even “in” the world to begin with. As the fundamentalists became more sectarian, other conservative Protestant groups, in the words of Olsen, “wanted to distance themselves from that movement while remaining theologically orthodox” in regard to their interaction with culture.¹⁸ Concern emerged among evangelicals as to how much of the arts and culture one could embrace “in the world” without becoming “of the world.”

This did not mean that views on the arts, especially the dramatic arts, among these various sectors of evangelicalism were all that different at first. The reasons may have included the emergence of Hollywood as a culture, and the somewhat racy content found even in early movies of the day. Movies like *The Gay Divorcee* in 1934 (which did not use “gay” in the same way that *Brokeback Mountain* did some seven decades later), *It Happened One Night* in 1934, and *Gone With the Wind* in 1939, sent shockwaves through the evangelical world because of storylines that questioned traditional boundaries of morality, the ramifications of which were especially emphasized in the separatist elements of evangelicalism. Such fundamentalist books as *Going With the Wind* (1942) illustrate this by declaring the movie theater as “public enemy number 1,” citing examples of debauchery on and off the screen in relation to the popular movies of the day.¹⁹ Of course, during this era before television, a large majority of Americans were attending movies each week, and this attendance (like the attendance at the playhouses in Wesley’s day) was competing with time given to churches and evangelists. Furthermore, it was exposing adults and youth to issues that were far outside the relatively safe realm of dialogue found in American small town life. This caused reactionary evangelists to decry Hollywood as “that hellbound set” whose main focus was, according to fundamentalist evangelist U. E. Harding, “divorcing, racing, drinking, and leg-showing [and other hyper-sexual pursuits].”²⁰

It was not just the separatist fundamentalist groups who reacted in this way to America’s growing interest in movies and other popular and fine arts. During this time Wesleyan-Holiness groups echoed sentiments

¹⁸Ibid., 594.

¹⁹Edward Vander Jagt, *Going With the Wind* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1942). Incidentally, Vander Jagt lists dancing as “public enemy number 2,” just in front of “booze,” which is called “public enemy number 3.”

²⁰*Movie Mad America*, chapter 2.

similar to this (emphasis mine): “Whereas, There is *danger* in the excessive use of dramatic productions in our schools and colleges; be it Resolved, That this practice be *carefully restricted* and greater emphasis be placed on the *spiritual exercise* that leads to *sound Christian experience*.”²¹ Throughout its nearly 100-year history, the Church of the Nazarene has seemed to illustrate in microcosm form the sentiments regarding arts—especially movies—resident in larger evangelical circles. In fact, according to Christian screenwriter K. L. Billingsley, it is the Holiness Movement evangelicals like Nazarenes, Wesleyans, and Free Methodists who have been more likely to condemn acting and movies in total rather than strive to make movies “cleaner,” although reformed evangelicals had problems with movies in general, too.²²

As early as 1936, Nazarenes were admonished to avoid the theater in the same way they were to avoid ballrooms, casinos, lotteries, the circus, and secret oath-bound orders.²³ The strained relationship between movies and twentieth-century evangelicals sounded very much like the rift between early evangelicals and the playhouses of the previous centuries. This is true for evangelical statements regarding other facets of the arts. For example, one can hear Wesley’s eighteenth-century warnings that dancing can lead to “numberless evils” in the Church of the Nazarene’s earliest statements regarding dancing: “The Church of the Nazarene is opposed to all forms of modern or folk dancing in public or private gatherings, even under the guise of physical education classes.”²⁴ Even late

²¹Section 902.4, adopted in the 1940 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene. This exact wording remains in the latest edition of the *Manual* (2001-2005).

²²K. L. Billingsley, *The Seductive Image: A Christian Critique of the World of Film* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1989), 17.

²³See *Manual*, 1936 edition, section 25, part 1, paragraph 7.

²⁴*Manual*, 1989 edition, section 904.6. This statement appears up until 1993, when this paragraph was removed. Also, in section 34.4 of the 1989 edition of the *Manual*, it states that members of the Church of the Nazarene are to abstain from all entertainments that detract from Christian growth, including (34.4), “All forms of social dancing. We hold that such practices tend to break down proper inhibitions and reserve between the sexes.” However, in 1993, this paragraph was changed to read that, among the list of detrimental entertainments, we include “All forms of dancing that detract from spiritual growth and break down proper moral inhibitions and reserve.” Similar changes in regard to drama and motion pictures will be noted below.

into the twentieth century, the broad evangelical community tended to shy away from the embrace of dancing, visual arts, most forms of music, and especially of drama and theater arts (popular and classical).

Bridging the Gap: A Dramatic Turn

African-American scholar Michael Eric Dyson states that the black ghetto culture of the 1940s and 1950s should be seen as a “bulwark against the racism of the larger society that embodied the spirit of ordinary people.”²⁵ James Hal Cone has demonstrated the link between the theological journey of African-Americans expressed in spirituals and the honest sharing of the pains and turmoils associated with that same journey in the “secular” sounds of the blues.²⁶ The blues, which represents the “secular” aspect of African-American culture, helped to weave the sufferings and absurdities of black religious life into the “Sunday morning” songs (i.e., spirituals) in order to fully demonstrate the realities of black life *in toto*. Although initially the relationship between the “secular” music of black life was looked down upon by the black church, eventually there was a fusion and even a somewhat cooperative relationship between aspects of African-American secular and religious music.

Likewise, the relationship between evangelicals and the dramatic arts experienced some dramatic changes as the twentieth century progressed. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association ventured into the movie business in the early 1950s, leaving many evangelicals confused as to how to support such a move.²⁷ Holiness Movement leaders, along with reformed evangelicals were not ready to fully embrace the idea of going to the movie theater, regardless of the “Christian content” of some movies. Noted Holiness Movement scholar and evangelical leader Stephen Paine (former president of Houghton College) in 1957 compared attending movies in the theater to “taking fire into one’s bosom” since

²⁵Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 87.

²⁶Cf., James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), especially 127-128, where Cone states that the blues function to affirm black humanity “in the face of immediate absurdity.”

²⁷<http://www.billygraham.org> See Peter Chattaway, “Billy Graham Goes to the Movies,” at www.christianitytoday.com/movies/news/billygrahammovies.html, in which Chattaway traces Graham’s ventures into cinema, starting with the 1951 film *Mr. Texas*, followed by *Oiltown U.S.A.* in 1954.

attending a Hollywood movie would make one an “accomplice to an industry that is causing untold crime and moral degradation among the young people of our country.”²⁸ In Holiness denominations like the Church of the Nazarene, the 1950s through the 1980s saw little change in admonitions concerning the dangers of both dramatic arts in schools and the attendance of the theater as “dangerous” to the well-being of its members.

In addition to movies in the theater, the popularity of television became another front upon which battles for Christian purity was fought among evangelicals of every hue.²⁹ In the late 1970s, Beta machines and VCRs increased the availability of uncut movies to the general public, and some churchgoers viewed these vehicles as ways around the strict laws forbidding attendance in movie theaters. One notes a dramatic change in the way in which movies and similar entertainments are beginning to be addressed. The 1989 Nazarene *Manual* still lists the cinema among “entertainments which are subversive to the Christian ethic,” but adds “except films produced by Christian organizations.”³⁰

The provision regarding “movies produced by Christian organizations” disappeared, and subsequent editions of the *Manual* were reworded regarding movies, with each successive edition denoting a shift that can be detected even by the casual observer in regard to the relationship between evangelicals (especially Holiness Movement evangelicals) and drama. Like Wesley, late twentieth-century evangelicals were still skeptical regarding arts and drama; however, they seemed to begin to take seriously the art of critiquing and analyzing works in the dramatic arts, while seeking to develop a “Christian” aesthetic. It is no mere coincidence that the emergence of a Christian culture that seeks to be more analytical than reactionary in regard to the movies (and other artistic expressions) has seen significant changes in the kinds of films being produced and in the way in which churches—including those in the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions—have tried to cautiously embrace certain products that have come from Hollywood.

By the 1990s, the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene made some noteworthy changes, including the removal of language that essentially

²⁸Quoted in Billingsley, 17.

²⁹Note *Manual* statements like the one in 1964, where television is added to the list of entertainments that should be viewed with caution if one is to keep oneself pure from the world.

³⁰*Manual*, 1989 edition, section 34.1.

banned, or at least strongly discouraged, the study of dramatic arts from Nazarene schools for over 75 years.³¹ Furthermore, there appears to be much more emphasis on individual discernment regarding the attendance of movies, as opposed to an all-out call for avoidance of every movie theater.³² It is noteworthy that this cautious embrace of drama and the movies emerged when major evangelical organizations such as *Christianity Today* are producing periodicals such as *Books and Culture*, as well as online websites, which offer in-depth movie reviews and cultural analysis from a Christian perspective. It seems that evangelicals, including Holiness Movement evangelicals, are making some degree of peace with Hollywood, without blindly embracing everything Hollywood produces. The results in recent years have been seen in the way in which some of Hollywood's products have been award-winning quality films that actually portray Christianity, or at least positive moral values, in a more positive light.³³

Conclusion: Keeping the Baby, Throwing Out the Bath Water

Evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz reminds us that “to live as Christians [those who in Jesus’s words are ‘in the world’ but not ‘of it’] in the contemporary situation requires that we engage the situation.”³⁴ Such engagement, Grenz says, can be summarized as “attuning, analyzing, and applying.”³⁵ In regard to the movies, evangelicals can “attune” by engaging this medium of culture analytically in order to become a people who truly listen. This listening is not a blind acceptance, nor is it a blanket avoidance of the realities of the culture in which we live. Rather, we honestly engage the stories being told in the medium of drama and film in

³¹See *Manual* statement from 1993 onward in regard to drama.

³²See especially *Manual*, 2001 edition, 34.1, where Christians now are encouraged to use their gifts to positively interact with and influence the media (including movies).

³³Some recent noteworthy contributions of this nature include *Forrest Gump* (1995), *The Green Mile*, *The Lord of The Rings Trilogy*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. All of these films achieved strong box office success, partly due to positive reviews from the Christian community.

³⁴Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 18.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 18-19.

order to assess where those stories are in relation to Christ. We then can analyze what is being produced in order to (in Grenz's words) "burrow beneath the periphery of each situation so as to pierce it to its core."³⁶

K. L. Billingsley suggests that this kind of attuning and analyzing may happen for Christians in regard to the movies by learning how to watch a movie critically, by learning how reviewers (both secular and Christian) do their jobs, by using the power that VCR and DVD give to exercise control and deeper analysis of a film, and by simply strongly supporting those films that tell the kind of story that intersects with the Big Story of redemption and grace found in Scripture.³⁷ Simply protesting the films that are "evil" is not enough. Nor is it enough to ignore this powerful storytelling medium as if it did not exist (as evangelicals once did). Instead, Christians can develop analytical skills through education and theological interaction with one another in church life and academic life in order to utilize the medium of film to effectively tell the story of God and humankind.

As evangelicals, Wesleyan or otherwise, we are right in heeding the warnings of our predecessors in regard to the dramatic arts—indeed, in regard to all forms of art. Aesthetics, which is that branch of philosophy charged with evaluating the question "What is beauty?" falls under the category of axiology in philosophy. The other subcategory of axiology is ethics, that branch which asks, "What is right?" It is clear, then, that what we regard as "beautiful" and "artistic" has something to do with our values—what we consider "right," and our evangelical forbears recognized this. However, it seems that what they proposed as proper expressions often were no more than romanticized views of biblical aesthetics.

We are also not called to simply utilize movies or any of the performing or visual arts as a means to make the Gospel more palatable to secular people. In the words of Tillich: "The question cannot be, 'How do we communicate the Gospel so that others will accept it?' For this there is no method. To communicate the Gospel means putting it before the people so that they are able to decide for or against it."³⁸ We are not simply to "build a bridge" to culture by utilizing its "tools" (i.e., the movies) in order to appease culture and water down the message of Christ. Rather, we are to seek H. Richard Niebuhr's model of "Christ transforming cul-

³⁶Ibid., 19.

³⁷*The Seductive Image*, 198-201.

³⁸Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 201.

ture,” rather than the more often practiced “Christ against culture” model.³⁹ Will Willimon reminds us that “culture is overrated.”⁴⁰ So, what can evangelicals do in response to creations in arts, especially in motion pictures, that may somehow bridge the distance between Hollywood and the Kingdom of God, and without diminishing the latter?

It seems that the answer is becoming clearer in regard to this balance between engaging the culture through dramatic arts and becoming too much like the culture around us. In a recent *New York Times* article, John Leland interviewed several evangelical Christians regarding the new interaction with the movies. The article states that, instead of simply protesting or castigating even the more controversial movies of our day (the article specifically cites the controversial *Brokeback Mountain* that explicitly depicts two men in a homosexual relationship), evangelicals are moving beyond simple rhetoric and are giving solid reasons for either their dismay or approval of films. They are addressing the films analytically, and then seeking to bring to bear their analysis as Christians who are unafraid to honestly assess movies based on their artistic as well as their theological merit.⁴¹ The *Times* article, quoting Dr. Robert Johnston at Fuller Seminary, states: “There’s been a recognition within the evangelical community that movies have become a primary means, perhaps the primary means, of telling our culture’s stories. For this reason, evangelicals have become much more open to good stories, artfully told, but they also want stories whose values they can affirm or understand.”⁴² This represents a key shift in the relationship between evangelicals and film. Real bridges are being built between the stories of culture and the story of the Gospel.

As any parent or children’s director who ever tried to choose a Bible story to read to young children can tell us, the Bible contains material that would easily be rated “R” (or worse) in most motion picture theaters of today.⁴³ This is because, in the words of George Knight, “the Bible deals

³⁹See H. Richard Neibuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), chapter 6.

⁴⁰William H. Willimon, “Culture is Overrated,” in *Leadership Journal*, Winter 1997.

⁴¹See John Leland, “New Cultural Approach for Conservative Christians: Reviews Not Protests,” *New York Times*, December 26, 2005.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³A casual survey of movies such as *The Passion of the Christ* (rated R), portrayals of the life of David, and other such “Bible-based” films demonstrates this.

with both good *and* evil, and puts both in proper perspective. To emphasize only the good and beautiful is less than biblical. Such a practice would be a romanticized aesthetic, but it certainly would not be true to life in the sense that the Bible is true to life.”⁴⁴ In recent years, Christians have recognized this in such movies as *Schindler’s List*, a movie that caused many Christian colleges and universities to change their “no rated R movies” policy so that professors could make use of this powerful tool for teaching not only about the Holocaust, but about the struggle for good and for redemption in humankind. Likewise, stirring portrayals of the violence of crucifixion in rated R movies such as *The Passion of the Christ* became one of the largest box office draws in history, mostly due to evangelical Christian participation. This is not to say that we blindly accept everything Hollywood has to offer; rather, it reminds us that, as Christians, there are stories worth repeating and new stories worth telling through this medium if we dare to engage it with Christian conviction and discernment.⁴⁵ New Testament scholar Robert Jewett has sought ways in which contemporary films and ancient biblical texts can be “brought into dialogue by means of an interpretive arch.”⁴⁶ In this way, Jewett seeks to use the modern analogies present in a host of contemporary movies to interact with and clarify for a contemporary audience key themes of Scripture. His work is an example of attempts by contemporary Christians to carry the message of Jesus to the world, while likewise heeding the warnings of Jesus and James (and others) in regard to discernment and purity.

Indeed, we must heed the admonitions of Jesus and of James if we are to remain Christians in a polluted world. We must be “in the world,” yet “sanctified by the truth” of Christ so that we are not “of the world”

⁴⁴George F. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1989), 179. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵Movies such as *Shawshank Redemption* and *Unforgiven*, both of which may contain scenes that Christians would object to, also tell stories that can be utilized by Christians to convey biblical themes. In *Shawshank*, for instance, the lead character is clearly a “messiah” type of figure (innocently accused, suffered greatly, enlightened those around him, escaped death into paradise, provided a way for others to follow, etc.).

⁴⁶See Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph Over Shame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4. It is the sequel to *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle’s Dialogue with American Culture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

(John 17). Likewise, we are to adhere to such a strong “friendship with God” that we are not tempted to be consumed or at least distracted by “friendship with the world” (James 4:4). However, it must be noted that many of our attempts as evangelicals to be separate from the world have actually resulted in a complete disengagement from dialogue with the world around—the world we are called to “go into” as followers of Jesus (see Matt. 28:18-20). We go into that world, having Christ at our side empowering us through His Spirit to engage in conversation with the world where and how it is, and then building a real bridge from where it is to where Christ is.

Christians have always recognized drama’s ability to tell a good story and pull us into that story in a participatory way. This sounds very much like what we as “sent” Christians are to do with the message of the Kingdom of God: tell them the story in a convincing way, and invite participation. Therefore, we should not discount the usefulness of drama and motion pictures as tools in this calling, either as direct vessels of proclamation or as indirect “discussion starters” for weaving the story of the world into the Big Story (the meta-narrative) of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁷ Movies are assessors of the culture around us and are at times warnings regarding where the culture could go. Movies are tools of master storytellers that can be used for either redemptive or exploitive purposes. The presence of real Christian analysis and engagement with this powerful medium can help bring about more accurate portrayals of Christianity and of Christ himself, who when exalted has always been able to draw men and women to himself.

Some forms of entertainment *do* endorse and encourage “holy living.” Therefore, as the 2001 edition of the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene says: “We especially encourage our young people to use their gifts in media and the arts to influence positively this persuasive part of culture.”⁴⁸ Given the history of outright avoidance of this and many other similar evangelical groups in regard to arts and culture, this new admonition may take years to come to fruition, but, in regard to our call as Christians to be the kind of friend with the world that engages their stories and points them to the Big Story of God’s redemption, it seems like a good start.

⁴⁷See H. R. Rookmaaker’s discussion on the “uses” and the multiple purposes of art (one of which is simply to provide beauty, something that even movies of our day have done), in H. R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

⁴⁸*Manual*, 2001 edition, 34.1.

WHOSE TABLE? WHAT GUESTS? THE EUCHARIST AS HOSPITALITY

by

James N. Fitzgerald

John Wesley left for his theological progeny a varied, even “storied” history regarding the question of who is to be invited and admitted to the Lord’s Supper. From the days of Wesley’s missionary efforts in Georgia, there are two significant incidents of his “fencing the table” of the eucharist. In one instance, Wesley refused to serve Johann Martin Bolzius because of the issue of Bolzius’ baptism. The refusal was not because Bolzius had never been baptized, but, in Wesley’s own words, because Bolzius had not been “baptized by a minister who had been *episcopally ordained*.”¹ It was an incident that Wesley himself would later describe as “high church zeal” for protecting the Lord’s Table.

The second episode was the incident when Wesley refused to serve Sophia (Hopkey) Williamson, ostensibly because she had not presented her name to receive the eucharist with enough advance notice. The issue was complicated by the fact that the former Miss Hopkey had been a romantic interest of John Wesley. Recently married, her husband brought civil charges against Wesley to a grand jury in Savannah, based on that and other incidents at which he took offense. Of the ten counts in the

¹*The Works of John Wesley*, bicentennial edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), vol. 20: 305. Hereafter cited as *Works*. Wesley’s comment on this twelve years later was, “Can anyone carry *High Church* zeal any higher than this? And how well have I been since beaten with my own staff!” His regret over this incident was deep.

indictment against Wesley, two were for repelling individuals from Holy Communion, and two were for refusing the selection of individuals as godparents because they were not regular communicants.² In stark contrast to those incidents where Wesley refused to serve communion to those who approached the table, just a few years after his return to England a visitor to one of his services made the observation that Wesley, “seemed to allow all promiscuously to come to the Lord’s table.”³ Wesley had charges leveled against him from both ends of the spectrum saying that he was being too harsh in his efforts to fence the table, and being too lax on the same issue.

Using the tension between these episodes in John Wesley’s ministry, this essay explores the question of the hospitality of the eucharist. More specifically, the following three questions will be addressed from within the Wesleyan tradition:

1. Is it inhospitable to restrict access to the eucharist—to fence the table?
2. If the table is fenced, what are the requirements for admission? Who is to be invited?
3. How should requirements for admission to the table be “enforced”?

In considering each of these questions, a trajectory will be traced from John Wesley to the 21st century, considering how the questions have been answered at various points along an “arc” of Wesleyan liturgy and practice.

Is It Inhospitable to Fence the Table?

John Wesley inherited a tradition in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England (hereafter BCP) that had clear instructions for those presiding at the eucharist. The Prayer Book had a prescribed formula of warning: “My duty is to exhort you to consider the dignity of the holy mystery and the great peril of the unworthy receiving thereof, and so to search and examine your own consciences, as you should come holy and clean to a most godly and heavenly feast.” Would-be communicants

²There was obvious personal acrimony in the charges, but the validity of the charges was not ultimately put to the test. Wesley made an early return to England before the matter went to court.

³*Works*, 26:48. The observation is passed along to Wesley in a letter from Rev. Ralph Erskine, dated January 31, 1741.

were to test themselves against the Ten Commandments, confess their sins, repent of wickedness, reconcile quarrels and make restitution, “for otherwise the receiving of the holy communion doth nothing else but increase your damnation.” At each communion, the congregation was told that “if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of his Word, an adulterer, or be in malice or envy, or in any other grievous crime, bewail your sins and come not to this holy table, lest after the taking of that holy sacrament the devil enter into you.”⁴

As is often the case, there was considerable opportunity for variance between the written instructions and the pastoral implementation thereof. In the more than century and a half that had passed from the inception of the BCP to Wesley’s time, the pendulum had swung back and forth between stringency and laxity in implementing these directives. In the 1570s, when there was growing concern about admitting unworthy members to the table, “bishops tightened their rules on access, and there was a flood of books on preparation for the sacrament.”⁵ In the early seventeenth century, there were concerns that the pendulum had swung too far the other way, and some of the clergy had become overzealous in excluding parishioners from the sacrament. This led to requirements that priests submit a list of the names of any who had been denied communion.⁶

The Prayer Book itself had, from the beginning, made provision for appropriate exhortations to be spoken to the congregation. One option exhorted parishioners not to partake unworthily, while a second option exhorted them not to neglect the sacrament, i.e., because of an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. An Elizabethan catechism demonstrates the way the clerics attempted to strike the appropriate balance. It argued that full perfection is not possible, yet imperfection should not keep one “from coming to the Lord’s Supper, which the Lord willed to be a help in our imperfection and weakness. . . . Yea, if we were perfect, there would be no need of any use of the Lord’s Supper among us. But hereto these things that I have spoken of do tend, that every man bring with him to the supper repentance, faith, and charity, so near as possibly may be, sincere

⁴Christopher Haigh, “Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 51, No. 4, October 2000: 724.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 723.

and unfeigned.” Wesley, then, had inherited a tradition that did not shy away from fencing the table, yet did not want to fence it in such a way that kept earnest parishioners away. It was a tradition Wesley continued, though he implemented some changes in the method of fencing the table.

John Wesley retained the sense of the urgency of soul-searching preparation for the celebration of the eucharist. One example of the way that he expressed the dangers of unworthily receiving the sacrament can be found in the lyrics of this hymn (#56) in his *Hymns for the Lord's Supper*:

1. How dreadful is the mystery
Which, instituted, Lord, by Thee,
Or life or death conveys!
Death to the impious and profane;
Nor shall our faith in Thee be vain,
Who here expect thy grace.
2. Who eats unworthily this bread
Pulls down Thy curses on his head,
And eats his deadly bane;
And shall not we who rightly eat
Live by the salutary meat,
And equal blessings gain?
3. Destruction if Thy body shed,
And strike the soul of sinners dead
Who dare the signs abuse,
Surely the instrument Divine
To all that are, or would be, Thine
Shall saving health diffuse.⁸

When Wesley prepared *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*,⁹ he included a eucharistic liturgy that was essentially the same

⁷Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism written in Latin . . . translated into English by Thomas Norton*, ed. G. E. Corrie (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1853), cited in John E. Booty, “Preparation for the Lord’s Supper in Elizabethan England,” *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (April 1967), 140.

⁸J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, American edition, edited by Timothy J. Crouch. Cleveland, OH: OSL Publications, 1990, p. H-18.

⁹A reprint is available in *John Wesley’s Prayer Book: The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, with introduction, notes, and commentary by James F. White (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 1991).

as the BCP liturgy. The prayer book was received in America with neither the same devotion that Wesley personally had for it, nor with the devotion that he anticipated for American Methodists. Shortly after Wesley's death, the book underwent significant editing. Both the editing of the service book and the loss of the use of Wesley's eucharistic hymns brought about changes in the actual eucharistic practices of American Methodists. The focus on penitential preparation for the sacrament was not lost, however. Simply put, along the trajectory that we are following, there has been no substantial change in the principle of fencing the table. There have been changes in the question of how, precisely, that is done, but *that* the table should be fenced has not been seriously brought into question.¹⁰

What Are the Requirements for Admission? Who Is To Be Invited?

From at least as early as the time of Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, the Church has considered baptism as a minimum requirement for admission to the table.¹¹ At times this has been explicitly stated, at times it has merely been implied, and at other times it has been rejected as a requirement. Through the centuries, however, this has been a starting point for the conversation. Aside from the previously mentioned incident in Georgia (with Johann Bolzius), John Wesley did not directly address the question of whether baptism was required for admission to the table. There has been "vigorous debate over whether Wesley himself viewed baptism as an absolute prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper. He

¹⁰Within the United Methodist denomination there have been significant changes in the question of whether or not the table should be fenced. See L. Edward Phillips, "Open Tables and Closed Minds: United Methodist Attitudes Toward the 'Open Communion Table,'" *Liturgy* 20(4):27-25; Mark W. Stamm, "Open Communion as a United Methodist Exception," *Quarterly Review* 22 (3), Fall 2002: 261-272. Phillips comments, "Many United Methodist congregations go beyond the conventional ecumenical sense in which an open table means opened to baptized Christians in good standing from other ecclesial communities. Rather, Methodist openness typically means openness to everyone who may be present at the communion service—be they Christian, or curious agnostic, or even Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist" [27-28]. Similarly, Mark Stamm writes that "many (if not most) United Methodists have already settled the question—official rites, rubrics, and resolutions notwithstanding. Indeed, the vast majority of United Methodist parishes practice a completely open table, with no restrictions whatsoever, and they have come to take it for granted" [262-263].

¹¹James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 54.

never explicitly addressed the point. The majority of scholars have argued that Wesley simply assumed it, since most of those who found their way to Wesley's societies were already baptized. And yet, they were not all baptized, nor is it absolutely clear that Wesley required them to be baptized before entering the society or partaking at its table."¹²

In the Church of England in Wesley's day, while baptism (followed by confirmation)¹³ was generally considered a minimal requirement for admission to the table, it was not the only requirement. The BCP tradition established three general reasons for denying someone admission to the table: sin, malice, and ignorance.¹⁴ In other words, Anglican practice in Wesley's era was that a baptized, confirmed member who was not an "open and notorious evil liver" was invited to the table. Wesley's encounter with Moravians during and immediately subsequent to his Georgia experience drew his attention beyond the Anglican thresholds of baptism and confirmation to the issue of *assurance* of one's salvation. This focus would have considerable influence on Wesley's reflection on the sacraments.

While Wesley was positively influenced by the Moravians, he eventually split with them over conflicting views on the sacraments. The Moravians taught that the eucharist was not to be received by anyone who did not have full assurance of faith in Christ. Through the testimony of others (including Wesley's mother, Susanna), Wesley came to believe that the eucharist itself could be the very moment that assurance was experienced.¹⁵ The rift over this issue widened, with the Moravians teaching their "still-

¹²Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 228.

¹³John Bowmer notes that "The Church of England, in principle, allowed only the confirmed to communicate, for to them the Sacrament was a confirming ordinance, reserved only for those who had been initiated into membership." *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951), 108.

¹⁴Haigh, 722.

¹⁵Wesley's journal entry for Monday, September 3, 1739 reads: "I talked largely with my mother who told me that till a short time since she had scarce heard such a thing mentioned as the having forgiveness of sins now, or God's Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; much less did she imagine that this was the common privilege of all true believers. 'Therefore' (said she) 'I never durst ask for it myself. But two or three weeks ago, while my son Hall [son-in-law Westley Hall, married to her daughter, Martha] was pronouncing these words, in delivering the cup to me, 'The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee,' the words struck through my heart, and I knew God for Christ's sake had forgiven *me* all *my* sins.'" *Works*, 19:93.

ness” doctrine and Wesley countering with his view of the sacrament as a converting ordinance. Wesley’s journal (June 1740) records the substance of the growing rift between himself and the Moravians who were a part of the Fetter Lane Society. So disturbed was he by the Moravian stillness teachings that he gave daily discourses for a week at Fetter Lane on the means of grace, from Sunday, June 22, through Saturday, June 28. On Friday (June 27) he insisted that the eucharist was a converting ordinance:

Experience shows the gross falsehood of that assertion that the Lord’s Supper is not a *converting* ordinance. Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your *conversion* to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep *conviction*) was wrought at the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶

On Saturday, he again affirmed that the eucharist could be a means of *preventing* grace, and thus a *converting* ordinance:

I showed at large, (1) that the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a *means of conveying* to men either *preventing* or *justifying*, or *sanctifying grace*, according to their several necessities; (2) that the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they *want the grace* of God, either to *restrain* them from sin, or to *show their sins forgiven*, or to *renew their souls* in the image of God; (3) that inasmuch as we come to his table, not to give him anything but to *receive* whatsoever he sees best for us, there is *no previous preparation* indispensably necessary, but a *desire* to receive whatsoever he pleases to give; and (4) that *no fitness* is required at the time of communicating but a *sense of our state*, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is *fit for hell* being just *fit to come to Christ*, in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.¹⁷

This view of the sacrament was disseminated to Methodists through Wesley’s collection of eucharistic hymns, with verses like the following:

Sinner, with awe draw near,
And find thy Saviour here,
In His ordinances still,
Touch His sacramental clothes;

¹⁶*Works*, 19:158.

¹⁷*Works*, 19:159.

Present in His power to heal,
Virtue from His body flows. [#39, v.1]¹⁸

Come, to the supper come,
Sinners, there still is room;
Every soul may be His guest,
Jesus gives the eternal word;
Share the monumental feast,
Eat the supper of your Lord. [#8, v.1]¹⁹

The “open table” which this implies must be put into perspective. While the invitation given by Wesley was much broader than was common in the Anglican Church, it was not a blanket invitation given to all, regardless of intent or desire. It was an invitation to sinners, but sinners purposefully seeking the grace of God. In most cases, membership in a Methodist society was required, but membership in Methodist societies did not require conversion as a prerequisite.

The resources Wesley provided for the Methodist Episcopal Church in America had the potential to produce an approach to the eucharist which closely paralleled Wesley’s, but that potential was never realized. Wesley’s *Sunday Service* was not embraced, and in 1792 (the year after Wesley’s death) it underwent considerable revision.²⁰ There is no evidence that an American edition of Wesley’s 166 eucharistic hymns was published, and the most widely used Methodist hymnal in early American Methodism had just nine eucharistic hymns included.

Lester Ruth makes the argument that early American Methodists came to consider the Lord’s Supper as among the forms of what was for them “private worship.” Like the meetings of the classes and societies, and their Love Feasts, the Lord’s Supper became a ritual that was “restricted in access, even to the point of overt exclusion.”²¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Methodism proclaimed a much more open invitation to the table. No longer was membership in a Methodist society

¹⁸Rattenbury, H-13.

¹⁹Ibid., H-3.

²⁰For a discussion of the revisions, see William Wade Nash, chapter 2, “The Liturgical Revision of 1792,” in “A History of Public Worship in the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, From 1784 to 1905,” Ph.D., Notre Dame, 1981, 87-206.

²¹Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 103.

a requirement for admission to the table. Methodists were concerned to distinguish themselves from Baptists who practiced “close communion.” A mid-nineteenth century polemical Baptist work, defending their view of close communion, drew the following Methodist response:

When the table is spread, by any one denomination, and the bread and wine placed thereon, it is emphatically *the table of the Lord*, and not the table of *that particular denomination*. The duty of the administrator is to invite all orthodox Christians who are in good standing in their respective Churches—as the Methodists *invariably* do—to join in the commemoration of the death and sufferings of Christ.²²

Although there were efforts by some mid-nineteenth-century Methodists to make baptism a requirement for admission to the table, those efforts failed, primarily due to this disagreement with Baptists. In the midst of the debate, Methodists “were reluctant to concede . . . the necessity of Baptism prior to Communion.”²³

As various holiness denominations formed and developed their rituals for communion, they generally framed the invitation with baptism not explicitly mentioned as a prerequisite for admission to the table, nor was membership in their particular denomination required. They would admit members of other churches to their table, with the expectation that, although they were not formally members, their lives would conform *in principle* to the membership requirements of that denomination. The Free Methodist Church, in its “general directions” for the Lord’s Supper, stipulated that:

1. No person shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper among us who is guilty of any immoral or unchristian practice for which we would exclude a member of our Church.
2. All persons properly included in the general invitation may be allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper among us.²⁴

²²William G. Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined; or, Its False Spokes Extracted, and An Exhibition of Elder Graves, its Builder* (Nashville, TN: Published for the Author, 1856), 178.

²³Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

²⁴*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* (Rochester, NY: Published by the General Conference, 1866), 114. The Pilgrim Holiness

The first *Manual* of the merged Church of the Nazarene included the statement that the Lord's Supper is "distinctly for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance. . . . It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein."²⁵ The statement remains virtually unchanged today. The ritual includes the words, "This is His table. The feast is for His disciples."²⁶ There has generally been a progression, in the rituals, to a more restricted invitation (as compared to Wesley), with no formal provision through the liturgy to make the broader scope of the invitation a part of the service. A notable exception would be the instructions in the *Discipline* of the Wesleyan Church which read: "It is expected that Wesleyan ministers shall carefully admonish the people that only those who are in right relations with God and with their neighbors should come to the Lord's table, and that others should come only if in so doing they are expressing repentance and seeking forgiveness."²⁷

These instructions explicitly offer the possibility of an invitation to those not yet converted, and offer the possibility of the eucharist as a converting ordinance.

How Should Requirements for a Person's Admission to the Table be "Enforced"?

The clergy of the Church of England employed a variety of means of fencing the table. They included house to house visitation and examination of one's fitness for admission to the table a fortnight before quarterly communion, or monthly visitation by the parish priest for the same purpose. Some clergy issued tokens to those who qualified to communicate.²⁸ Additionally, parishioners could object, even as a fellow parish-

Church position on admission to the table was, "No person shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper who is guilty of any practice for which we would exclude a member of our church." *Manual of the Pilgrim Holiness Church* (Indianapolis, IN: The Pilgrim Publishing House, 1954), 103.

²⁵*Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene* (1908), 30.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 63. The current ritual for the Church of the Nazarene contains the same phrasing.

²⁷*The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2000* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2001), 354.

²⁸Haigh, 728-729. He notes that the use of tokens was "usually to exclude those who had not paid their contributions."

ioner knelt to receive, resulting in their being turned away.²⁹ The exhortations that were included in the BCP liturgy served as another layer of the fencing of the table, and the recitation of the Decalogue was intended as a point of reflection and self-examination. Multiple means, then, were used to fence the table.

Wesley's initial desire was that Methodists would receive the Lord's Supper in their local parishes. When that took place, the fencing of the table was a matter for the parish priest. As Methodists began to call for (and receive) more eucharistic services of their own, they had to come up with their own ways of fencing the table. Membership in the Methodist societies became the primary means of accomplishing that. The commitments made by those who were received into membership in Methodist societies became the measure of their admission to the table, provided they remained a member in good standing. Communion tickets or tokens—issued to Methodists who were examined and found to be in good standing—became the practical, visible method of fencing the table. Essentially, the fencing of Methodist societies doubled as the fencing of the table.

Early American Methodism adopted the same means of fencing the table. Wesley's confidence in both the appropriateness and the effectiveness of this method of determining one's admission to the table is arguably the reason that Wesley dropped the BCP exhortations from the liturgy when he created the *Sunday Service*. With those exhortations gone, one of the layers of fencing the table was gone and the focus centered on society membership. As the function of accountability and examination within the society declined over the course of the nineteenth century, the purposeful examination of communicants also declined. In practice, "most Methodist churches in the nineteenth century saw the 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent' as a sufficient safeguard when ministers and church leaders carefully judged worthy communicants by that standard and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith."³⁰ When holiness denominations began to form, several of the layers of fencing the table had fallen out of use and were not recovered by them. There were not specific exhortations provided in the liturgy, and the recitation of the Decalogue was not generally incorporated. Neither specific means nor

²⁹Ibid., 738-739.

³⁰Tucker, 144.

specific time frames were designated for examination by pastors, classes, or societies.³¹

While several of the formal means of fencing the table had fallen out of use, there were still measures used to create a fence, albeit more subtle ones. While the rituals were generally brief, and included no formal exhortation, the scripture that was read frequently served as a means of fencing the table. The Church of the Nazarene *Manual*, for example, has always instructed that the administration of the Lord's Supper may be introduced by an appropriate sermon and the reading of 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, Luke 22:14-20, or some other appropriate passage. The selection of the verses influences the tone of the invitation to the table. In the Luke passage, the break at verse 20 avoids the issue of the presence of Judas, the betrayer, at the Last Supper. The boundaries of the Corinthian passage serve to highlight the warning on eating and drinking unworthily, without giving a context for those cautionary words. It lends itself to a different interpretation than Wesley had for that passage: "Wesley's conception of 'eating and drinking unworthily' is not 'being unworthy to eat and drink,' but he interprets the words in the sense of a sinner taking the Holy Sacrament in such a rude and disorderly way that one was 'hungry and another drunken.'" ³²

While some of the more overt means of fencing the table became absent, the fencing was stringently accomplished nonetheless. Officially, the restrictions to admission to the table may have become fewer, but in practice frequently the words and the tone in which they are spoken created a daunting boundary.

Conclusion

As scholars at the close of the twentieth century began to more clearly articulate Wesley's views of the sacraments, many pastors, seeking to be serious about their Wesleyan tradition, have been faced with signifi-

³¹A notable exception was some of the churches in the Northeast prior to their merger into the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. The First Pentecostal Church of Lynn, Massachusetts, for example, made provision for monthly communion, and their *Manual* specified, "The covenant meeting should be held the last Friday evening before the first Sunday in every month, and the Holy Communion should be celebrated on the succeeding Lord's day." *Manual of the First Pentecostal Church of Lynn, Mass.* (Providence: Pentecostal Printing Co., 1898), 14.

³²Bowmer, 113.

cant challenges as they seek to reincorporate portions of their worshiping tradition that have fallen out of use. Specifically, how can the hospitality of the eucharist (extending a broader invitation) be practiced in ways that more closely reflect Wesley's pattern? There is nothing in our Wesleyan tradition to support the suggestion that fencing the table and a view of the eucharist as hospitality are mutually exclusive. In fact, I would suggest, it is possible (even preferable) to simultaneously focus on extending an invitation to the table to those not yet converted *and* develop more specific ways of fencing the table. Essential to this approach is a renewed emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a *means of grace*, not *just* a memorial of the death of Christ.

If the Lord's Supper is seen as a means of grace, the invitation to receive that grace should be offered as widely as possible. One should extend the invitation to the table to all who are present and seeking the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Yet, as Geoffrey Wainwright notes, "Tensions arise between the poles of communion as a means of grace and the need to maintain the integrity of the celebrating community. To receive communion is to become part of the sign-enacting community, which is charged with the faithful stewardship of God's mysteries in the world."³³ To limit the scope of the invitation is poor hospitality; but to extend an invitation that fails to give the truth of the new life to which one is invited is likewise poor hospitality. As Mark Stamm comments, the invitation to the table "must not contradict the biblical expectation that those who eat and drink with Jesus will repent, opening their hearts to new life. . . . Those who would eat and drink with Jesus may well be warned as well as invited."³⁴ The broad invitation is to practice "eucharist as hospitality." The warning is fencing the table. Fencing the table, if done appropriately, is setting a boundary. And boundaries are not antithetical to hospitality, but a component of genuine hospitality.³⁵ According to Thomas Oden:

A community with no boundaries can neither have a liturgical center nor remain a community of worship. A center without a

³³Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecu-
menism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

³⁴Stamm, 269.

³⁵For a discussion of the interplay between hospitality and boundaries, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), particularly chapter 7, "The Fragility of Hospitality: Limits, Boundaries, Temptations," 127-149.

circumference is just a dot, nothing more. It is the circumference that marks the boundary of the circle. To eliminate the boundary is to eliminate the circle itself. The circle of faith cannot identify its center without recognizing its perimeter.”³⁶

The goal of fencing the table is not to create a boundary that is impermeable. Instead, we delineate one that is clearly marked, with an open invitation to all to enter. The boundary’s intent is less to keep people out than it is to mark a threshold that all are invited to cross. In faithfulness to the tradition of Wesley, a significant part of that invitation should be into a community of faith where there is accountable discipleship—which becomes an important part of fencing the table. In one sense, the eucharist does not create the boundary, but it lets us see where the boundary is. So the invitation is given. This is God’s table. All who are earnestly seeking God’s grace, in repentance, are invited to God’s feast.

³⁶Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2003), 131.

THE ROOT FROM WHICH THEY SPRING

Presidential Address,
Wesleyan Theological Society, March, 2006

by

Craig Keen

I have been a university educator for over a quarter of a century. My area of expertise is theology. Theology is, if it is anything at all, a way of paying attention to God. Simply put, professors of theology profess God. That is why good people send their children off to college to study with theologians, with people like me. And I—professor that I am—do profess God, overtly, loudly, passionately. What is so embarrassing, though, is that I have such a hard time saying what it is that God means. You would think that someone laboring in this field for so long would have at least that much nailed down! Yet I must confess that I do not.

The Life Which I Now Live in the Flesh

The problem is not that I am a closet infidel, hiding behind some plastic mask of public piety (like a candidate running for office). I try very hard to be honest and open, particularly where I am most professional. That is, my comprehension-failure is no secret. In fact, I would think nothing would be more evident, as I go on and on in class, than that I *strain* just to get that black hole of a little three-letter word out. But, of course, my task as a professor of theology is not *just* to get that one word out; I am to throw out a whole galaxy of words and ideas and images and practices and passions that are agitated by and drawn into that black hole.

Of course, on the other hand, speaking of God in this way is mis-speaking, hopelessly. To say “God” is surely not to say a compressed and compressing density, that heaviest, darkest phenomenon of orthodox physics. And, though there are speculative physicists and writers of science fiction who think of a black hole as a portal to another, distant point in space-time—and it might not be out of the question to think of one as an exit portal to some altogether different *configuration* of space-time, some new cosmos even—I have for a long time now been unable to speak of God as a way out of this earthy world. Speaking of God seems rather to be a way into it, even if from the outside.

There, I have already said too much. My social/historical/political location is showing. Yet there is nothing surprising about that. Every college sophomore knows that God is tradition-specific. One opens the dictionary to the “G” tab and there one finds a meandering account of the roots of the little English word, roots that draw nutrients from deep inside pagan soil, where perhaps the ordinary usage of God is more happily at home. Provocative phrases about sacrifice and invocation appear in the midst of its history, their subjects and objects mingle, and in it all there is no outbreak into anything particularly transcendent (though transcendence appears as a universal within this system). Everything swims in the warm immanent amniotic fluid of human consciousness. God as such is held fast, protected from aphasia, and assigned the task to speak well in accordance with the language that houses it. Thus, God says something that is generally true, able to be heard everywhere and by all; a grand linguistic phenomenon, an absolute truth, the chief exemplification of all metaphysical principles, no doubt.

And yet, I read in another big book that when the very particular Job sits on the ash heap, alone, aching, burning, and with every new upset tempted to curse God and die, he turns his two wide eyes to the mystery of the open sky, and with a passion that rips apart the fabric of space-time and its God, cries, “Violence!” (Job 19:7) and, as if encountering something new on the far side of the sun, prophesies, “I know my redeemer lives” (Job 19:25; cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9). And I read that with him—in a maelstrom so fierce that even Job’s immeasurable suffering seems a shadow cast from what is for him yet to come—Emmanuel, hanging, dying, gasping for air, opens his throat and cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!” (Matthew 27:46); and when “the curtain of the temple [is] torn in two . . . [as if encountering something new on the far

side of death and damnation], Jesus, crying with a loud voice, [prophecies], ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’” (Luke 23:45b-46).¹ It strikes me that there is uttered in these narratives a word that no sequence of letters, however small or large, can contain. And I strain to say this new word when I stand before a classroom full of the children of good people. I strain to say it in such a way that no good person could ever say or hear it. And likely, were I just able to find a really good counselor, I’d put this obsession behind me and get on with my life.

The question for me, then, is “why, why do I see and hear this way?” Most of my colleagues these past decades have seen and heard differently. They seem much calmer about it all, speaking as they do of the good, the true, and the beautiful and of how God fits so well into a system of values, goals, and ideals, i.e., a world view; how the story of Job and of Jesus and of God is a story that resolves questions, not complicates and ruptures them. They have told me that it is all about absolutes and universals and all I seem ever to see and hear are contextualized particulars, the life-stories of people with *particular* faces and voices, of a God with a *particularly elusive* face and voice. Of course, it may just be that I have been beguiled by Protestant nominalism, that I have fallen prey to that most modern of all perversions, postmodernism, that I am a child of my age. Indeed, I suppose this is all true. How could I honestly think anything else, even as I strain to say something other than the banal or exceptional talk of my age?

My journey has been a particular one, too, of course. Everyone’s is. I don’t understand much of its significance. It is not over after all. Yet I would venture to say that it is the way I have been given and made time, the way I have come to let time go, the timely way I have begun to be named. Whatever that tiny English pronoun—I—might signify in this case, the thinking and speaking and working attached to it happen here, in this story. And it isn’t just my story.² I’m not even sure I qualify for a best *supporting* actor nomination.

It is not insignificant for this story that my hard Scots-Irish ancestors cut their way across an ocean and the rivers and forests of a forbidding New World to reach for the promises they’d heard were hidden under the

¹I do not wish simply to conflate the rhetorical move made in this passage of Matthew with the one made in Luke. These are two different texts that happen to be stitched together in the codices of the church and read in its liturgy.

²Anymore than this address is an autobiography.

cruel Appalachian Mountains of 18th-century Virginia, or the cruel Ozark Mountains of mid-19th-century Arkansas, or the cruel hills of late 19th-century Oklahoma; it is not insignificant that both my parents were raised in abject poverty by single mothers in the Great Depression's dust bowl; that I am an only-child; that I attended nine schools before I went away to college; that I was 18 in 1968; that in the summer of that year, while reading the Book of Acts in the Desert Southwest, I became a pacifist; that the theologians I first threw myself into were Søren Kierkegaard and John Wesley—no theologians at all, some people tell us; that I have spent my life among Holiness people; that I still think about the lyrics to Bob Dylan's *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*; that I am an ordained deacon and not an elder; that I have been married 36 years, have three children, and five grandchildren; and that I have had already a long career as a professor in four private, self-consciously evangelical universities.

Perhaps it is all of that which inclines me on a crisp spring morning—obligated to stay put, though these days I am—to make my way to some tall, broad, clear window and there to dream of the open road. Perhaps it is all of that which inclines me as well in the morning, afternoon, or night of any and every day to make my way to some tall, broad, clear window of the church—an icon “written” canonically across salvaged planks of wood, or a page of its Holy Scriptures or creeds, or the histories of its martyred mothers and fathers, or the liturgy of the eating and drinking of the Eucharist—and there to dream of God.

And When I Saw Him, I Fell at His Feet as Dead

A dream of God is no ordinary dream, nor night terror, as Daniel and John the Revelator teach us. It is an *apocalyptic vision*. As such it makes manifest things respectable people do not want to see, perhaps cannot see. It manifests above all that there is a tomorrow that no yesterday can dictate. But it does so with the ambiguity that accompanies every call to revolution. “The Reign of God is coming,” it says, “and it is coming for *you!*” As a member of one of the world's more comfortable socio-economic classes, I should recoil with horror from this word. “Woe to you rich!” Jesus, the apocalypse of St. Luke, declares (Luke 6:24). And yet, perhaps stupidly, I find myself drawn to the apocalyptic literature of God. It is bewildering, a terrifying mystery story; but somehow fascinating.

Not all mysteries are fascinating, of course, especially if, like this one, they are irresolvable. The exact numeric value of pi is a mystery to

which is attached neither *tremendum* nor *fascinans*. Those mysteries that most commonly fascinate us are those that we expect with some effort to solve. They are intellectual challenges—mountains that we set out to conquer, even if only because they are there. They remain fascinating only so long as they simultaneously resist and yield to us. Once they are resolved, we move on to something else. We might wax proudly nostalgic as we recount the thrills of our victories, but to remember a *former* mystery is not to *face* a mystery.

Those of us who have been struck by an apocalyptic vision of *God* would tell a different story. To be thus God-struck is to face what Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, points to when he says that the passion of the thinker is to think what cannot be thought.³ God is an irresolvable, engaging mystery that won't let us go, that won't ever let us rest in peace (cf. Psalm 139:8 and 1 Peter 3:19). God revealed is God hidden, and "how unrestingly active God is in all [God's] creatures, allowing none of them to take a holiday."⁴ Further, the engagement of this mystery is absolute. It calls for each of us to stand up to it with the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, as Wesley never tires of reminding us.

Neither Wesley nor Kierkegaard is an escapist mystic, however. They are both children of the earth, practical people who (unlike Luther) love the Book of James, who love the way a command of God takes shape in the concrete evenings and mornings of ordinary women and men. Kierkegaard has a better eye for the ambiguity of all human works; Wesley has the better eye for their definiteness as they become good news particularly for the poor. But the earthy concreteness of the work to which they both give themselves is inspired by a vision of the *New Earth* that we cannot see without the miracle of new eyes. Kierkegaard may stress the "cannot" of this miracle and Wesley its "new eyes," but in doing so they both bear witness to the impossible event in which we come to yield to an Other who simply will not become our property. Indeed, as we perform the

³Søren Kierkegaard [Johannes Climacus], *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

⁴Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, trans. and ed. Philip S. Watson, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, vol. 15 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 200–239, the direct quotation is found on 234.

works that bear witness to this Other, Kierkegaard and Wesley would have us let go of those works as well, as *formerly* Rich Young Rulers who, without grieving, follow Jesus through the eye of a needle (Mark 10:18-27). To *keep* the works of love, the works we have done, to *hold onto* them as our property is to be poisoned by them, sickened unto death.⁵

If We Have Been United with Him in a Death Like His, We Will Certainly Be United with Him in a Resurrection Like His

I am a theologian. The works I do are mostly academic and intellectual, the works of words. Just about every day I face the challenge of gathering my thoughts before a classroom of students or a blank computer screen. And I have a lot of thoughts, having read too many books and articles, attended too many lectures, listened in too many senior seminars, spent too many hours—way too many hours—before movie and television screens and loud speakers, pondered too long the words and deeds of my family and friends and enemies, and found out too many times that I had gotten it all wrong and had to begin again from the beginning.⁶ That means that I have many possessions, intangible though they may be—or at least that’s what I hear. The question for me, then, is only a slightly different version of the one that went through the man of Mark 10, the man whom Jesus loved. “You lack one thing, Craig; go, sell what you own, and give . . . to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21, sort of).

⁵John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 112 [25.38.8]; Sermon 14, “The Repentance of Believers,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, *Sermons I: 1-33*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 352 [III.4]; Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, *Sermons II: 34-70*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 182-185 [III.1-5]; Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, 188-194 [I.1-II.5]; Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, 296-298 [IV.1-4]; Søren Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus], *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 18; Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 40-43, 246-263.

⁶Perhaps that simply shows that even when one has gotten it all wrong, one might still pray. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, *The Doctrine of Creation*, part 3, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 265.

Now, I could look at Jesus' command as an investment opportunity. "Treasure in heaven" sounds like a pretty profitable return. The problem is that when "treasure" gets attached to "heaven," everything gets upended. "Heaven" signifies "mystery" (here is that word, again!).⁷ "Our Father who art in heaven" says chiefly that the God we meet through Jesus is cloaked in mystery.⁸ "Treasure in heaven" is then a very strange treasure, one I cannot enter into a calculator, one that does not add to my net worth. And so, I'm left, having received the command of Jesus, with an unimaginable promise. It is a positive promise, that I do gather from the passage; but it is one which I have trouble objectifying enough to covet. I suspect that even Husserl would have had trouble conceiving of such a treasure. I am commanded by Jesus to give up all my property for the sake of a most unsettling impropriety. To be honest, it all sounds to me like one big expropriation manifesto. And yet again and again and again the question rings in my ears—"Craig, son of James, do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15-17, sort of). And something stirs in me and I want to say, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (17).

How do I *not* go away grieving? How do I feed his sheep? I'm a thinker, and not a very good one at that. Am I to become more ignorant than I am already? Am I to become thought-poor? Is this a call to some Jungian *sacrificium intellectus*? How do I not go away grieving? The answer—like the yes of a child to the voice of the mother who calls her name—rises insolubly before the mystery precisely of the evocative *gospel*. "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). The mystery before which I am to give up all my intellectual possessions is the mystery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

But this sacrifice of the intellect—and that is the right, though non-Jungian, phrase—is no suicide. The mystery of the *gospel* is that Jesus

⁷Gerhard von Rad, "*ouranos*, Old Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. V (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 507; Helmut Traub, "*ouranos*, New Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 520-521, 525.

⁸See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 106.

Christ gives himself to the coming of the “God not of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:27), the coming of the *living* God. The mystery of the gospel is that Jesus’ Holy Father, alive in heaven, is made manifest in *life*. The mystery of the gospel indeed is that the forsaken death of the carnal Son makes the Holy Father manifest, but that it does so through the *resurrection* of his dead and damned body. The mystery of the gospel is that it is into his *glorified* dead and damned body that *we* are called to move; that it is in that life that we come alive, that we are saved; that there we repeat (derivatively) his life-rhythm of crucifixion/resurrection—through the liturgy of baptism and Eucharist—because his body is nothing but the life-rhythm of crucifixion/resurrection. The mystery of the gospel is that our evenings and mornings become a kind of dance of death . . . swallowed up in life, that resurrection life is so alive that even death is no contrast to it.

It is into this liturgy that Peter and I are called. We are called to Jesus’ sheep—standing wide-eyed as they do in this world God so loves—to offer them the *food* that is precisely this body into which we have been incorporated. We hear, Peter and I, we hear and believe that to *eat this body* is oddly not for it to be incorporated into us, but for us to be incorporated into *it*—and thus for us to repeat (derivatively) the rhythm of crucifixion/resurrection. It is in this way that we are to *live*, together as “a *living* sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), one performed again and again and again, pouring out what is freshly given to us—as might a spring that gives water only as it is replenished with the gift of unearned rain (John 4:9-14).⁹ That is the mystery of the *gospel*.

As a theologian, who hears and believes, I am indeed to gather my thoughts, but only in order to give them away. Had the Rich Young Ruler not departed grieving, had he indeed followed Jesus, he, too, would have gathered his property in order to dispose of it. But doing so is never dropping the ballast of worldly goods in order to soar into some higher “spiritual” realm in order to get out of this world. Following the crucified/resurrected Christ *is* the work of giving away our goods. However, it is performed precisely as an act of plunging into the world, the world hallowed when the carnal body of Christ is glorified in the glorification of the Father on Easter Sunday morning. It is precisely the glorified carnality of the body of Christ that calls to us, Peter and me, renews us in the

⁹Cf. Wesley, Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, especially 434-436 [I.8, II.1] and 442 [III.2-3].

image of God that is Christ, awakens in us sacramental works of mercy, and grants to us the mind of Christ.¹⁰ Therefore, on the day new goods come into our hands, on that day our hands do not become unclean. How could they, since they have been hallowed by the nail-pierced hands of Jesus? Rather, they are gifted—gifted with a gift that will not become property. And a gift that does not become property is there to be unhanded. To follow Christ, to have the mind of Christ, is with him perpetually to be emptied (Philippians 2:5-8; cf. John 4:14).

But how am I, a theologian who has no trouble remembering that he is a human being, to pull this off? The answer in our tradition is a simple one marked by a simple Latin phrase: *sola gratia, sola fide*. It is pulled off by grace alone through faith alone, and faith, as Ephesians 2 reminds us, is itself a gift of God; otherwise believing would make us haughty. It is finally all grace. This is something Wesley learned from Arminius, the quite non-Pelagian renegade of the Dutch Reformation. But it held true prior to Wesley and Arminius, prior even to Holland, prior to Europe—and will have held true long after Europe and all the world's nation-states it spawned have joined Wesley and Arminius in the grave—that “for mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

To say this grace and faith is to say Trinity. God the Father moves out through God the Son in God the Spirit to a world that first and last covets its riches. The Trinity calls to this world from the depths of hell and gathers it into the body broken and left to rot there, the body of Christ in whom the Spirit glorifies the Father. By entering into the body of Christ, the discarded bits of decaying tissue that litter hell are stitched together to make that body's vital organs, they there partake of its glory—the holiness, the love, of the Father—and move in the Spirit into the same world that treated them so badly. My calling as a theologian is to do my word-work down this path, too, a body-part of a journeying body, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks, rejoicing evermore, moving back and forth from this groaning earth to the earth eschatologically redeemed, from the earth eschatologically redeemed to this groaning earth. To stand before a classroom full of students or to sit before a blank computer screen is in this way to pray, give thanks, and rejoice in the mystery of the gift.

¹⁰Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3, *Sermons III: 71-114*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 308-321.

The Gospel to the Poor

There is another dimension to Jesus' call to the Rich Young Ruler, to Peter, and to me, one no more detachable from it than is depth from a geometrical solid. The Rich Young Ruler is commanded to disperse his goods to the *poor*. How am I to obey this command, I who profess God before classrooms full of students with the resources to attend expensive private universities?

If I held the opinion that Jesus' attention to the poor in this narrative and elsewhere is to be sublimated into a generic concern for other people ("aren't we all poor in some sense?"), then I would have no problem at all. And it is true that all my students are given to me by God to be served. However, there are actually hungry people in the world—people like my parents were when they were hungry little children—people who are having the life sucked out of them day in and day out by the forces of what we so calmly describe as globalization. As long as I remember that God emptied the tomb of the crucified Jesus, as long as I remember that God made Adam out of the dust of the earth, as long as I remember that it is the *body* of Christ that is salvation, as long as I remember that the church is constituted by the eating and drinking of the Eucharist, as long as I remember that Jesus fed the hungry, as long as I remember that "the whole tenor of scripture" bears witness to God's prevenient grace particularly for the poor, I cannot reduce them to one more item on a uniform list of those for whom we are to care.

We are to care for the poor in particular and above all. We are to care for the poor in particular and above all, because God cares for them in particular and above all. God's grace is not an abstract "decision" not to punish those who deserve punishment. God's grace is God's movement out into the world to save it, i.e., to sanctify it. The grace of God is the Spirit of God, the Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The Spirit is explosive, holy life. She is the wind of a storm, the pounding current of a raging river. And God's grace rushes particularly to the poor. We know that because she rushed particularly to the poor man Jesus, laid out on a cold slab in a cold tomb. If we pray to enter into that grace, we pray that we will be carried on its current particularly to them, to people with faces, dirty, hungry faces, faces I know all too well. That is what I hear in Jesus' call to the Rich Young Ruler and to me.

This, of course, means that he and I are to spend our resources directly for the poor. However, there is in Jesus' command a specific

question addressed to me and to people like me, a question that has specifically to do with the word-work of a theologian. It seems so bloodless and distracted and insensitive, but I am a theologian and I am compelled to ask it right out loud: what does it mean for me, a theologian, a word-worker, to obey the call of Jesus to give to the poor?

I do think that in part it means that I am to remember and hope for the poor with my words. I am to give my thoughts away before people who are not hungry for the sake of those who are. I am to teach in the direction of the poor, unhanding my intellectual goods for them, calling my students to unhand theirs goods, and confessing my own unworthiness to take such words on my lips, praying that I, too, will hear the words I am given to say, that I will hear them and obey. But there is more to the call of Jesus than this. To turn to the poor in obedience to the command of Jesus is not to give them a hand up, to teach them to fish, to give them the business skills to begin the steady climb into the middle class. All that already trembles before the principalities and powers we call capitalism. To turn to the poor in obedience to the command of Jesus does not even require that one not oneself be poor. The poor, too, are called to the poor. And we—rich and poor alike—are called to stand in solidarity with them—without demanding that they cease being poor. Doing so is a means of grace not only for them, but particularly for us.

Grace comes particularly where calculation has come to an end. And does anyone doubt that standing in solidarity with the poor without demanding that they cease being poor requires an act of trust, of hope, before an incalculable mystery? Not to go away grieving signifies that in the word-work I do I am to take up the task of Isaiah 6 and Mark 4, to be situated like a surd in that social-political-economic field that *makes* people poor. It is to name the beast that devours them and with them to look it in the eye, unafraid. That is, for me to give my goods away to the poor is for me to face the freedom of the God who raised Jesus Christ from the grave, a freedom that does not need sound economic policies, that does not need the system of acquisition, private property, productivity, fixed and circulating capital, investment and return, commodification, supply schedules, derived demand, profit and loss, competition, division of labor, markets, wages, and debt. To give my goods away to the poor is among other things to bear witness to an economy of giving and forgiving, an economy of impropriety, an economy that remembers the hope of the resurrection of the Crucified. That is, to give my goods away to the poor is

to live and speak and write before the mystery of God's holy love, a love that comes as an unsettling holiness that will never be a line-item on an asset management tally sheet.

This Is My Body That Is Broken for You

Trinity, crucifixion/resurrection, church, the poor—this is the mystery I strain so hard to say, when I stand before a classroom full of the children of good people. My task, as a theologian, is to think it and say it again and again and again. That is what *meta-noia* quite literally means, in particular in my particular case. My task is to think-after, in pursuit of, the way of God into the world. My task is to take whatever thoughts I can find and let them loose before a classroom or a reader or a banquet hall in the liturgy of the Eucharist, the liturgy in which the broken body and shed blood of Jesus are manna, food that is to be eaten, not stockpiled.

It may be that one day Alzheimer's disease will have rotted away all of my thoughts and that there will be effectively nothing there that a professor might give and no professor there to give it. And yet I will not be alone in that place either. Among the wonders of the gospel is that Jesus is there as well—shining with the light of God's glory. Still, as long as I have eyes to see, I am called on each new day to look for the small round things that God has placed on the face of the wilderness where I sojourn, to pick them up and eat them, to hold out in the freedom of grace the works they enliven me to do, and to say right out in public with the plagiarizing Wesley, "I come, [Sovereign], to restore to thee what thou hast given; and I freely relinquish it, to enter again into my own nothingness. For what is the most perfect creature in heaven or earth in thy presence, but a void capable of being filled with thee and by thee; as the air, which is void and dark, is capable of being filled with the light of the sun, who withdraws it every day to restore it the next, there being nothing in the air that either appropriates this light or resists it? O give me the same facility of receiving and restoring thy grace and good works! I say, *thine*; for I acknowledge the root from which they spring is in thee, and not in me."¹¹

¹¹Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 113 [25.38.8]. These words are a part of a larger passage that Wesley calls "Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection." That passage ends with an eight page section that Wesley has adapted from the work of Jean Duvergier's posthumously published *Lettres Chrétiennes et Spirituelles* (1645). (Randy Maddox, Private Correspondence, April 14, 2006.) The details of Wesley's editing and use of Duvergier's work will be laid out in Maddox's editorial comments to vol. 12 of *The Works* to be published in the near future.

THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS: A WESLEYAN SAMPLING OF CUISINE

by

Kenton M. Stiles

Our inquiry here asks, quite simply, of what good is food? Our concern is not with the qualitative good, for it is obvious that all animal life requires sustenance. The remarkable tube worms of the Pacific Ocean rift zones feed on a boiling mixture of caustic fumes. The lions of Botswana's Okavango Delta prey on equally ferocious. Cape Buffalo in a brutally beautiful dance of life and death. Humans dine on sole almondine, eat succulent tenderloin steaks with baked potatoes, and even munch on the occasional pork rind. Food is a necessary good for life.

No, the question here regards the qualitative goodness of food. As such, it asks the question of beauty as known through the sense of taste. Even while asking this question, however, I must acknowledge the existence of culturally-conditioned differences between "higher" and "lower" forms of food, drink, their preparation, and their presentation. I must also admit a tentative or working acceptance of the taste-judgment that the "higher" levels of cuisine offer greater potential for better and more beautiful gustatory and olfactory experience. Also presupposed is an American context for my argument, although I do believe that it can be adjusted for other cultures without great difficulty. A final admission is that this consideration of the fine art of food is made within the general context of a Christian theology of hospitality, with the specific reliance on the theological resources of the Wesleyan-Holiness traditions and the field of theological aesthetics.

I will argue for giving cuisine greater prominence in our theological and practical expressions of Christian hospitality. After considering approaches to fine cuisine from the alternate perspectives of John Wesley and contemporary theological aesthetics, I will then employ aesthetic insights and schema from the religious philosophy of Charles Hartshorne to chart a constructive “middle way” for cuisine that will hopefully be acceptable to most Wesleyans. Fine cuisine caters to the upwardly-mobile, while Wesley’s “preferential option for the poor” challenges us to reach out with loving hospitality and friendship to those who are economically marginalized.

My “sampling” of this subject is fully intended as an appetizer on cuisine for Wesleyans interested in theological aesthetics. It is not a four-course, five-star meal. Indeed, I hope that new and improved recipes—perhaps even a veritable smorgasbord!—will follow and offer new richness and texture for a theology of hospitality. This essay is also a leveraged response toward evangelical Christianity’s tendency to relativize and devalue cuisine. The value and enjoyment of food’s inherent beauty and goodness has, for evangelicals, suffered unnecessarily due to lingering asceticism, inflexible models of stewardship, moralistic legalism, irresponsible biblical text-twisting, and cultural Philistinism. Years of friction between anti-sensual Christian chiefs and antinomian culinary chefs have created callousness or bias. The prejudice seems to go along these lines: people who are into fine cuisine, which is a thing of the world, cannot be equally into the things of the Spirit. I argue that, to the contrary, there need be no antithesis between Good News and good food. A middle way is indeed possible.

Tasting a Bite of the Crime

From the beginning, Christians have struggled with articulating a positive attitude toward the finer side of food. This problem dates as far back as Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian church, where tensions caused by religious food views were further compounded by congregational racial, social, and economic stratification. As the early church battled various Gnostic tendencies and witnessed the emergence of both solitary and small groups of hermits, a foretaste of the monastic and mendicant orders of later centuries, the ascetic attitudes toward food became more pronounced. Even Augustine, who was deeply sensitive to the aesthetic and appreciated beauty’s role in the soul’s return to itself,

was suspicious of food's sensual side.¹ There is great irony here. First, Augustine was the first Christian theologian to develop an extensive aesthetics; second, his understanding of the beautiful, while being *structurally* dependent upon the works of Plotinus and his student Porphyry, were *substantially* determined by his stance *against* his great adversaries, the Manichaeans. Thus, while Augustine rejected his own anti-materialist Manichaean past, his later Christian views on food did not fall far from the ascetic tree that the Manichaeans had planted within him.

Fast-forwarding to John Wesley, we find that he is equally torn on the matter of the aesthetic, generally, and food, specifically. For Wesley, although the many good and enjoyable forms of beauty/sublimity may indeed be produced by God in nature or inspired by the Spirit in the imagination of the human artist and experiencing subject, the Christian's ultimate duty is to leave behind earthly pleasures and strive for heavenly satisfaction, for such is the evangelistic need of the age. Wesley's sermons and journal entries do not deny the inherent goodness and value of the beautiful. His judgments may be at odds with the prevailing tastes of the day. He may feel, like Augustine, that the beautiful can be improperly used for evil. He may maintain that evangelistic Christians owe their ultimate allegiance to being about the business of the Gospel. But he cannot deny what the beautiful is *beautiful*. As a fellow of Oxford's Lincoln College and a frequenter of the tables of the high and mighty, Wesley was no stranger to finer foods. Yet he chose to live a meat-and-potato style of life.

In Wesley's theology we find several negative positions relevant to our study of cuisine. First and foremost, we see that he identifies "elegant Epicurism" with the humanity's "natural" state of *sensuality*.² The scripture reference for this first mention of Epicureanism is Romans 8:15, but most of his comments on food and the five senses refer to 1 John 2:16:

¹See, for example, how Augustine finds it best to downplay or avoid the pleasures of fine cuisine by regarding food as a medicine for staving—or perhaps starving?—off the body's deterioration (*Confessions*, X, 31).

²The phrase quoted above appears in John Wesley, "The Use of Money," Sermon 50 (1760), II.2, but the structural relation of Epicurean tastes to "natural" existence first appears in "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," Sermon 9 (1746), I.2. See Outler's note on Wesley's mention of the "Epicurean" in this early sermon (Albert Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 1: 252, n. 25). References—negative ones, of course—to Epicurean tastes are also found in "Spiritual Idolatry," Sermon 78 (Jan. 5, 1781), I.5, and "The Danger of Riches," Sermon 87 (Jan.-Feb., 1781), I.13.

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (KJV).³ This much-used verse in Wesley’s sermons is his favorite means for categorizing the worldly snares that lure weaker Christians toward sin.⁴ Wesley takes a broad stance against those things relating to the passions, senses, or other human appetites that are typical of humanity’s “natural” state of unnatural estrangement from the goodness of God and creation. Unfortunately, Wesley never gives us the option of considering a transformation of the senses through the operation of prevenient grace—a transformation which, after the senses are judged negatively in the “legal” state, are thereafter freed for individuals to enjoy in “evangelical” existence.

Wesley’s “practical divinity” also includes a rather matter-of-fact *economic* stance against fine food and drink. To not just live, but to live *well*, requires a considerable amount of money. A well-stocked pantry is expensive to maintain. Much time, money, and effort is also required to train and satisfy the discerning eye and palette. For Wesley, who believed that the use of money should be directed to giving “all you can” to those around you in need, the cost was simply too high. As enjoyable as fine cuisine might be, the position he advances in his sermons is that one’s Christian faith is best served by living on simple and healthful foods.⁵

³See, for example, “Spiritual Idolatry,” Sermon 78 (Jan. 5, 1781), I.5-18; “On Friendship with the World,” Sermon 80 (May 1, 1786), §16; and “In What Sense we are to Leave the World,” Sermon 81 (July 17, 1784). See also “Spiritual Worship,” Sermon 77 (Dec. 22, 1780), III.5, which does not quote from I John 2:16, but nevertheless discusses the dissipative use of drink and food in “unspiritual” merriment. This sermon should clearly be paired with “Spiritual Idolatry,” which was written only two weeks later.

⁴The appendix to the four volumes of the 151 sermons in *John Wesley’s Works* list a total of 42 distinct references to this verse in a total of 29 sermons—nearly one-fifth of Wesley’s total! Of these sermons, over half were written after 1780, but the other references are spread fairly evenly throughout his career. Two such occurrences, the sermons “Public Diversions Denounced” (Sept. 3, 1732) and “The Circumcision of the Heart” (Jan. 1, 1733), precede the Aldersgate experience by over a half-decade!

Fleshly lusts are those encountered through the five senses, and hence their relevance to our subject of fine cuisine. Visual lust is not strictly of the eyes, *per se*, but of the imagination. Carnal-leaning humans, according to Wesley, are drawn by the *mind’s eye* (i.e., the imagination) toward those things which titillate and tempt: grandeur, beauty, and novelty. The pride of life, which is a form of idolatry, entices weak egos through the majesty of pomp and ceremony, through the possibility of great riches, and through exaltation by human praise.

Here again, Wesley does not maintain that fine dining experiences are unpleasant, but rather that fine cuisine is wasteful, unnecessary, and poor stewardship.

A third reason for Wesley's objection to fine cuisine is his concern to uphold good health through eating plain and healthful food.⁶ Wesley was influenced in this matter by his own modest upbringing and later practices as an adult and by Dr. George Cheyne's book *A Book of Health and Long Life* (1724). Cheyne's work is "transcribed" from liberally in the introduction to Wesley's own contribution to public health, *Primitive Physic* (1747), in which a proper diet is advocated together with regular exercise, proper hygiene, and the practice of moderation. The great irony of Wesley's reliance upon Cheyne's expertise regarding a healthy diet is that the "good doctor" had an Epicurean appetite of epic proportions: at his heaviest, Cheyne weighed 32 stone—448 pounds!

The principle of self-denial is a fourth factor affecting Wesley's thoughts on cuisine. Evidence of this is found in his sermon on Luke 9:23, "Self-Denial," which was published in 1760. Outler notes that Wesley's mother, Susanna, employed this principle in the education of her children, and certainly it was one of the fundamental practices of the Wesleys' "Holy Club" in Oxford from 1729 to 1735.⁷ John's words on self-denial in this sermon are brief and succinct. He maintains that the practice is essential for Christian maturity and that one must "bear the cross" by diligence in a variety of gracious means. These means include works of piety, acts of charity, constant prayer, fasting, meditation, communicating and hearing the Gospel, and religious conference. Because fasting is a short-term practice, Wesley also advocates something that we might term "lifestyle changes" for those who struggle to live sacrificially on a daily basis:

But why does he not continue in works of mercy: Because he cannot feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, unless he retrench

⁵See, for example, John Wesley, "The Use of Money," Sermon 50 (1763), II.2; "The Danger of Riches," Sermon 87 (Jan.-Feb. 1781), I.13; "The More Excellent Way," Sermon 89 (July-Aug. 1787), IV.1-3; and "On Riches," Sermon 108 (Apr. 22, 1788), II.2-3.

⁶I am deeply indebted to Randy Maddox for the inclusion of this point, as well as his thoughts on Wesley's understanding of the sense of taste and its relation to humanity's "natural" state and prevenient grace.

⁷Albert Outler, ed., *Works*, 2:236-37.

the expense of his own apparel, or use cheaper and less-pleasing food. . . . He *would* reprove his neighbour; but sometimes shame, sometimes fear, comes between. For he may expose himself not only to ridicule but to heavier inconveniences too. . . . Therefore his faith is not made perfect, neither can he grow in grace; namely, because he will not “deny himself, and take up his daily cross.”⁸

The principle of self-denial is not far removed from the economic practices mentioned above. Indeed, its theology of sacrifice provides the foundation of such acts, yet these are also based upon practical foundations (i.e., common-sense economics).

Fifth, we have Wesley’s own positions on the sense and judgments of taste. While Wesley was no bohemian, he was very much aware of the aesthetic issues being discussed in English social and intellectual circles. He had social status as a Fellow and was accustomed to dining with notable people. Wesley was also well-versed in the popular poetry of the day, although he generally preferred religious or pastoral works.

Wesley’s writings indicate adequate knowledge of the aesthetic works of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper), Joseph Addison, Frances Hutcheson, Edmund Burke, and Alexander Gerard.⁹ Gerard’s case is especially interesting and relevant here. The evangelist

⁸Ibid.

⁹We know from frequent references in the Sermons, for example, that he had read Joseph Addison’s influential essay series, “The Pleasures of the Imagination,” that was published in *The Spectator* in June and July of 1712. Addison’s essays are not systematic in presentation, but they did anticipate most of the topics (e.g., taste, imagination, beauty, the sublime, and genius) that would be addressed in the coming century, the golden age of British aesthetics. Addison receives a favorable review from Wesley in the 1780 essay “Thoughts upon Taste.” Indeed, Wesley felt himself sufficiently astute in aesthetics to write two other essays, his “Thoughts on the Power of Music” (1779) and “Thoughts on Genius” (1787).

Wesley also refers frequently to Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who discusses beauty and developed an innatist aesthetic ethics in his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). Wesley had also read Edmund Burke’s famous *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). See Outler’s note on Sermon 78, “Spiritual Idolatry,” in *Works*, 3:108 n.23. Wesley also possessed, read, and responded, with certain disapproval, to Francis Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).

was not impressed by Gerard's views on genius, but did appreciate his book on taste. In fact, Wesley's own "Thoughts Upon Taste" (1780) incorporates the views of both Addison and Gerard. In this essay, Wesley calmly explores taste's relation to the pleasures of the senses, the understanding, and the imagination. Amazingly, these forms of pleasure, the same three from 1 John 2:16 that normally invoke dire warnings, are not condemned. Indeed, the pleasures of the imagination are listed with tacit approval:

Another species of taste is that which relates to the objects that gratify the imagination. Thus we are accustomed to say, a man has a taste for grandeur, for novelty, or for beauty; meaning thereby, that he takes pleasure in grand, in new, or in beautiful objects, whether they are such by nature or by art. And herein there is an unbounded variety.¹⁰

Unfortunately, we cannot know all the reasons why Wesley is so accepting of the imagination's pleasures here. One possibility is that this essay, as one of his later works, is one in which the notion of prevenient grace has a more profound influence on Wesley's understanding of humanity's so-called "natural" state of existence. Because the endowed presence of this grace in the lives of all people negates the penalty of original sin, Wesley can "go easy" on taste and the aesthetic because they now fall within the operation of grace. A second and more obvious reason is that he is preparing in the paragraph immediately following to advocate the consideration, acceptance, and emulation of a higher form of taste. This elevated sense of taste is the *moral* taste. I would argue that Wesley's sense of moral taste leads, in turn, to the highest of all forms of taste: a sense for the divine. It is through this sense that evangelical existence is enriched.

A close reading of Wesley's essay discloses several more surprises. One finds, for example, the unprecedented extension of an olive branch toward the moral sense philosophers (e.g., Hutcheson and Shaftesbury) that he strenuously opposes in all other settings. Wesley's peace-offering is two-fold. First, he does not attack the notion of the innate moral sense as expressed by the neo-Platonic and naturalistic philosophers. Rather, he allows it to coexist with the idea of a supra-natural—as opposed to *super-natural*—sense of morality as given by a "higher principle." Shockingly,

¹⁰John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Taste" (1780), *Works* (Jackson), 13:467.

he does not identify *God* as this “higher” source of goodness. Second, Wesley defers to Hutcheson and Shaftesbury’s sense of aesthetic *disinterest* as that which establishes the beauty of morality. Here we might expect to find Wesley saying, rather, that morality is *beautiful*—and it is indeed a stretch to imagine him employing this particular word!—simply because it is God’s revealed law.

This examination of Wesley’s understanding of taste demonstrates that he was well aware of term’s use in contemporary aesthetics. Nevertheless, his notion of taste would qualify his appreciation of cuisine since the taste for morality, even in its delicacy, far surpasses any taste grounded in the senses, understanding, or imagination. Furthermore, given Wesley’s understanding of humanity’s three spiritual states, the notion of the sense for the divine must be added to his definition of taste. Therefore, I offer the following formula as Wesley’s implicit doctrine of taste: natural state : aesthetic taste :: legal state : moral taste :: evangelical state : spiritual taste.

We come to a sixth and final factor that qualifies Wesley’s appreciation of the aesthetic: *evangelistic necessity*. In the Journals we often find the evangelist reflecting on a pleasurable experience or a judgment of taste. However, we then typically find him reminding himself of one of two things: (1) that the pleasures and beauties of the world will someday pass away; or (2) that the beauty he feels, if dwelt upon at great length, will keep him from the greater task at hand (i.e., the salvation of souls).¹¹ It is hard to be sure whether the joy he felt was really that short-lived, or if he was redacting his experience for didactic purposes.

On the whole, Wesley’s sentiments are hardly helpful for this study. While his Journal entries do not repudiate the pleasures he felt or deny the inherent value of the experiences, it is also true that his warnings and thoughts on food and an Epicurean lifestyle were not *entirely* wrong. There are great financial and soteriological costs involved when lives are more devoted to the cure of style than the care of souls. There are spiritual and moral forms of beauty and taste that are, in the final eschatological analysis, ultimately more important. There are also the dangers of dividing churches into the richer “haves” and the poorer “have-nots” and of forgetting the option for the poor by practicing fine cuisine on a con-

¹¹Here I refer the reader to my article “In the Beauty of Holiness: Wesleyan Theology, Worship, and the Aesthetic,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 2 (Fall 1997), 200 n.12.

gregational scale. And certainly the dangers of indulgence and sensuality circle like impatient cats under the well-set table.

There are, however, two areas where Wesley leaves some “wobble room” for his theological descendents who have an interest in the goodness and beauty of natural and human creativity. The first area concerns the spiritual transformation of physical reality. Wesley’s sermons hint at how this will occur in two domains: (1) in the spiritual transformation of the physical senses in the New Birth; and (2) in the physical transformation of the world, its creatures, and all their relations in the New Creation. With regard to the senses, Wesley normally follows traditional beliefs about the spiritual senses, which had been given new popularity in his day by the Cambridge Platonists. According to this view, following death and glorification the five perceptive modes would finally be enabled to sense the spiritual and eternal realities which the unregenerate can never sense and which the saved—by means of the gift of faith alone—can barely perceive “as through a glass darkly.”¹² However, in his late sermon “On Living without God,” Wesley reversed course, suggesting that the spiritual senses are awakened at the New Birth—that is, during life rather than at death.¹³ Here we think of the operation of prevenient grace upon the individual, including the senses. Unfortunately, he never carried his understanding of the gracious transformation of the heart “down” to the five physical senses. As far as the transformation of the non-human world is concerned, he suggests that the coming of the New Creation will not just restore the world’s original pristine beauty and harmonious relations, but so improve upon them that animals might even be capable of knowing God.¹⁴ Thus, in the New Creation the senses will be restored and enabled to further one’s knowledge and enjoyment of God.

Having seen Wesley’s views regarding the transformation of these two domains, we find that there is significant tension, if not outright inconsistency, between the transformation that he feels is possible *spiritually* but not *physically*. In holiness, the soul is set free for God, but the

¹²See, for example, “On the Discoveries of Faith,” Sermon 117 (June 11, 1788), “Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith,” Sermon 119 (Dec. 30, 1788), and “On Faith,” Sermon 132 (Jan. 17, 1791).

¹³“On Living without God,” Sermon 130 (July 6, 1790), §§9-13.

¹⁴“The General Deliverance,” Sermon 60 (Nov. 30, 1781), III.6. See also “God’s Approbation of His Works,” Sermon 56 (July-Aug., 1782), and “The New Creation,” Sermon 64 (Nov.-Dec., 1785).

body, mind, and heart are not also set free *for* the world. Rather, they are merely freed *from* it. Contemporary Wesleyan theologies that take the transformative power of grace and the goodness of creation seriously can overcome this tension.

A second area in Wesley's writings that holds some possibility for this culinary aesthetics are his thoughts on good conversation and table-fellowship, with which he has no quarrel. Over the courses of an excellent meal accompanied by good friends or new and stimulating acquaintances, good conversation flows naturally. Wesley admits that the conversation that occurs during such a meal has its own excellent qualities. Indeed, in the sermon "The Most Excellent Way" he chastises himself for quoting poetry that paints a dreary attitude of mealtime. It was Wesley's conviction that meals should be marked by *pleasantness*—the equivalent of "beauty" in his Journal entries—and good cheer. Outler feels that this reference to cheerfulness provides additional evidence for a surprising "holiness-happiness equation" in Wesley's practical theology.¹⁵

With regard to conversation itself, Wesley continues on in this sermon to say that "it is as natural to refresh our minds while we refresh our bodies." So far, so good. And while he does play the moralist somewhat concerning the healthy content that is desirable for Christian table-talk, this is entirely typical of the evangelist and is not as overbearing as it is elsewhere. What is surprising, however, is Wesley's brief elucidation of how-to's for ordering one's conversations in a "more excellent way":

In order to this it is needful, first, that "your communication," that is, discourse or conversation, "be good," that it be materially good, on good subjects; not fluttering about anything that occurs. For what have you to do with courts and kings? . . . We *must* indeed sometimes talk of worldly things; otherwise we may as well go out of the world. . . . Secondly, 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. Thirdly, see that it not only gives entertainment, but, in one kind or other, "ministers grace to the hearers."¹⁶

¹⁵Albert Outler, ed., *Works*, 3:270, n. 48.

¹⁶John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way," Sermon 89 (July-Aug. 1787), IV.3.

While Wesley might not have made any socialite's "top ten" list of desirable guests, his instructions are, for a zealous preacher, surprisingly *normal*. Common wisdom would agree: polite dinner talk should avoid the superficial and gossipy, maintain focus on topics that have good content, and hold one's interest by addressing "good subjects." As an added bonus, Wesley allows for discussing daily or popular events and, even more significantly, approves of *entertaining* conversation as long as it is "gracious."

Theological Aesthetics, Cuisine, and Hartshorne

Theological aesthetics is a category of theology that has experienced significant growth in the past three decades. This field is not a single area, however, but encompasses four levels of encounter between religion and theology, on the one hand, and aesthetics, the arts, art theory, and art history, on the other.¹⁷ What, specifically, has theological aesthetics to say about the art of fine food? Surprisingly, it contributes as much as the rest of contemporary theology, very little. This situation might not be what one would at first expect, especially after consulting one of several anthologies in this field.¹⁸ Upon a closer reading of such works, however, one quickly discovers that theological aesthetics is overwhelmingly concerned with the "fine" arts of painting, music, drama, architecture, sculp-

¹⁷The first of these areas is *theology and the arts*, which includes all practical considerations and interactions of the above topic areas. The second area is *aesthetic theology*, which covers all forms of creative expressions of theology (e.g., poetry, drama, music, liturgy, narrative, or homiletics). A third aspect is *doctrinal theological aesthetics*, which encompasses any particular doctrine that has been or can be explored in terms of aesthetics/the aesthetic (e.g., creation, incarnation, inspiration, Christology, or pneumatology). The fourth and final area, which I consider to be theological aesthetics proper, may be termed *fundamental theological aesthetics*, which refers to the use of aesthetics in the development of a comprehensive theological system. On these four areas, see also my own "Disfiguring Harmony: Reconciliation, Mark C. Taylor, and Postmodern Theological Aesthetics," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 131-57. While there are some minor differences with my own means of categorization, for the best overall discussion of these areas see the first chapter of Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁸See, for example, Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, eds., *Art as Religious Studies* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1995).

ture, and dance. Cinema receives a fair amount of attention, but little interest is shown in photography, cuisine, folk art, or the decorative arts. Yet, despite this regrettable bias against “low” forms of art, contemporary theological aesthetics contains the works of individuals whose ideas could easily be adapted to our subject of cuisine. Although Charles Hartshorne never identified his religious philosophy with this particular field, theological aesthetics, I find his thought uniquely suited to this discussion.

There is irony in selecting Hartshorne to guide this discussion of cuisine. Despite his great interest in the place that aesthetics has in metaphysics and everyday life, he was no aesthete or sensualist. Indeed, by all accounts, Hartshorne was a man of modest tastes, a teetotaler who ate and lived simply. He was the devoted husband of but one woman, Dorothy, to whom he was married for almost 67 years. He eschewed owning an automobile, choosing to ride a bicycle to local destinations. If Hartshorne had one great vice, it was his personal indulgence in his great aesthetic passion, the study of birdsong, in which he became a published expert.¹⁹

With the help of both theological aesthetics and Hartshorne, a positive approach to cuisine is possible. Given the general evangelical and ascetic biases of (Protestant) Christian tradition, however, there may still be a temptation for some to toss fine food onto the trash heap. Against this impulse we offer a biblical reminder regarding fine food’s fitness as a *positive* theological image: the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a banquet, a feast, and a wedding party. Indeed, Jesus, the one who verbally painted these celebratory and gustatory images, was himself caricatured as an Epicurean (e.g., a glutton and a drunkard) since these were the type of people with whom he dined. We might add that food is an object of human (co-)creativity and that, as creation, it is inherently good. And in defense of fine food, we can affirm that food, like any similar sensual object, leads to sin only when it is improperly used.

Hartshorne’s Guide to Theological Cuisine

Clearly, then, there is tension between the two positions. On the one hand, Wesley stands as representative of the Law, a legalistic and evangelistic opponent of sensual pleasure. On the other hand, we have the

¹⁹Hartshorne published numerous essays on the aesthetics of birdsong, but his greatest achievement in this area was the publication of *Born to Sing: An Interpretation and World Survey of Bird Song* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1973).

antinomian camp. Here we will find those who are too educated and upwardly-mobile, or who are too aesthetically inclined, or who find Wesley's concerns too extreme in a Christian culture where the world is not to be escaped, but enjoyed. It is precisely here, betwixt and between them, that Hartshorne's writings can act as a guide.

God, Beauty, and Aesthetic Value. To begin with, Hartshorne helps us maintain an open attitude toward cuisine by laying some important aesthetic foundations for theological thought and practice. Chief among these is the process understanding of aesthetic value as providing the ultimate framework for the metaphysical values guiding God and the world.²⁰ The process of life is a creative advance that seeks the intensification of self-achieved aesthetic value—a value that we can term satisfaction, harmony, or beauty. Aesthetic value is deemed the most basic value and is superior to the values gained from reasoned truth and moral action for these reasons: its value is inherent and immediate as opposed to being extrinsic and eventual, as with economic value. In contrast, all cognitive, ethical, and mathematical values are intermediate, located between the aesthetic and economic.²¹ While it is true that aesthetic values are often short-lived in our world of change, their constant fading does not negate the fact that these feeling-values, as *affective*, are most basic. The implication here for cuisine is that the pleasure encountered in fine food and the dining experience should not be denied or subverted by any concept or ethical patterns. Rather, the joy of food should be accepted *as* good since the immediate and intrinsic pleasure it provides in experience truly *is* good.

Hartshorne, like others in the field of theological aesthetics, also makes a theology of cuisine conceivable by insisting that aesthetics

²⁰This idea can be found many places in the writings of Whitehead and Hartshorne, but it is perhaps most obvious in the following quote from Whitehead: "There is an actual world because there is an order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world.... The metaphysical doctrine, here expounded, finds the foundations of the world in the aesthetic experience, rather than. . .in the cognitive and conceptive experience. All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order. The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God," *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926; reprint, New York: Meridian, 1974), 101.

²¹Charles Hartshorne, "The Aesthetic Dimensions of Religious Experience," in J. F. Harris, *Logic, God, and Metaphysics*, Studies in Philosophy and Religion, vol. 15 (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1992), 9.

should be readmitted into the realm of theological methodology.²² Theology, if it is to be so richly descriptive of God as to move the human heart, must be aesthetic. But it is not enough for our words to paint God aesthetically. Rather, for Hartshorne, our word-pictures must actually attribute aesthetic feeling to God's own being. Only by seeing a God who is moved by beauty, as opposed to a God who unfeelingly metes out reward and punishment from a distant heavenly throne, can we ourselves be moved to faith in that same God. When God is described aesthetically and the discipline of aesthetics—or perhaps the notion of transcendental Beauty—is readmitted to theological method, it is but a short and natural step from there to considering cuisine as a proper subject for theological investigation and practical application.

Much more could be and has been said on the matter of the relations between Hartshorne's views on God, beauty, and the aesthetic. However, one final idea worth mentioning here is the aesthetic image that Hartshorne prefers to use to refer to God: the world-poet. This image comes from the concluding pages of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* and is valuable to Hartshorne because it conveys the feeling of the soulful poet who is moved by tragic beauty.²³ The poetic analogy, which appears early in Hartshorne's writings, requires some revision, however, since it can lend itself to interpretations that are inconsistent with process thought's understanding of God. But, despite the image's shortcomings, Hartshorne will not abandon his aesthetic method for describing God. He suggests, instead, that the chorus director or stage manager is a more appropriate image since each better expresses the idea of God's role as the one who inspires creativity in and draws performances out of the actual performers on life's stage. With regard to culinary imagery, we could describe God as the master chef who identifies possible culinary genres and beautiful or sublime taste combinations, but leaves the actual menu, preparation, and presentation of choices up to the individual cooks and serving staff. Interestingly,

²²One finds this frequently in recent works by Frank Burch Brown, Patrick Sherry, Richard Viladesau, and Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, but all of these writers are responding to the clarion call of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

²³That Hartshorne approves of this sense of divine tragedy is seen best in his article "Whitehead and Berdyaev: Is There Tragedy in God?" *The Journal of Religion* 37, no. 2 (April 1957): 71-84.

the image of God as the stage director of life's cosmic drama is also adopted by Balthasar in *Theo-Drama*, his second systematic aesthetics. Both thinkers identify drama as the essential art that is analogous to the history of the world generally and to human events in particular.

The Aesthetic Matrix of Value. Hartshorne's understanding of beauty, which builds on ideas that Whitehead presented most notably in *Process and Reality* (1929) and *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), nevertheless possesses greater clarity and usefulness. Whitehead's definition of beauty is often elusive: it is the mutual conformation of the elements of experience, or the harmonious adaptation of *appearance* (i.e., the historical datum received in causal efficacy) to *reality* (i.e., the luring eternal aim in presentational immediacy) in the process of concrescence. Another way to describe beauty in the moment of experience is the classical notion of unity-in-variety, the relation between the One and the Many. Whitehead used broad and often overlapping phrases to express how these come together to create the tones/values created in adaptive process. Included among these terms are strength, massiveness, intensity, harmony, anesthesia, discord, destructive discord, and vulgarity.

Hartshorne, on the other hand, prefers to describe the One-and-Many with the less Platonic phrases "organic unity"²⁴ and "coherent diversity."²⁵ He also offers a more simplified illustration or definition of beauty within the moment of experience by means of a bulls-eye-like diagram or "matrix of aesthetic value."²⁶ The matrix, in which beauty is the optimal and central value, has two axes that help chart the combination of emotional tones (vertically) and the intellectual propositions (horizontally) that are present in the "surging mass of microscopic feelings" that constitute each moment of experience.²⁷ Perfect unity and absolute chaos

²⁴Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God*, 212.

²⁵Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation*, 159.

²⁶Cf. Dombrowski, *Divine Beauty*, 27. An illustration of Hartshorne's matrix diagram appears in various publications, including: *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1970), 305; *Born to Sing: An Interpretation and World Survey of Bird Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 7; and "Science as the Search for the Hidden Beauty of the World," in Deane Curtin, ed., *The Aesthetic Dimension of Science: 1980 Nobel Conference* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1980), 86.

²⁷Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Divine Beauty: The Aesthetics of Charles Hartshorne*, The Vanderbilt Library of Philosophy (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 166-67.

comprise the two extremes of the vertical axis of order; profound depth and superficial triviality comprise the endpoints of the horizontal axis of intensity. These abstract values are logically impossible to achieve within *actual* experience.²⁸ This understanding of beauty applies to each and every event/entity, whether it is the experience of a solitary atom or a bird, a tree or a child, a Beethoven symphony or a decadent chocolate mousse. The matrix also helps us understand that aesthetic value or beauty, according to the structures of process metaphysics, does not reside concretely in a given object, but only in experience itself.²⁹

The aesthetic matrix of value has relevance for culinary art on multiple levels. First, and most obviously, it helps us judge the intensity and complexity of the fine foods that we create and experience in times of Christian fellowship and hospitality. Making judgments of taste leads naturally to the next step of setting and maintaining higher standards for our cuisine (i.e., in terms of balanced intensity and organic unity). Third, given process thought's emphasis on the social nature of reality, it helps us understand that we can achieve balance or overall beauty in our dining experiences even when we partake of a food that is especially weak in some respect. A tart but complex dessert, for example, can be experienced with greater pleasure when it is accompanied by a moderately sweet fruit like a pear, or by a mild but creamy dessert cheese.

Above all else, this aesthetic matrix encourages us to achieve balance between our conservative and progressive views on cuisine. Hartshorne's schema reminds us that all extremes are unhealthy and unenjoyable. Whether we are speaking of chaos or monotony, on the one hand, or Wesley's sensory censure versus an indulgent Epicureanism, on the other, our goal should be to develop a position that can be regarded as holistic, healthy, and responsible. Given beauty's location at the center of

²⁸All experience *must* be understood as occurring within either of the two inner circles of the matrix. An event of absolute chaos, for example, is a logical impossibility since nothing can be created or exist where there is no harmonious synthesis. Similarly, a pure or unified experience is impossible. While process philosophy does maintain the existence of pure potentials (i.e., Whitehead's "eternal objects"), *as potential* they lack actuality and being. The results of all experiences are thus objective, and as such they are then experienced by God, who everlastingly treasures them, and by other entities for whom they stand as actual but slowly fading data for subsequent experiences.

²⁹Hartshorne, "The Aesthetic Dimensions of Religious Experience," 9.

the matrix, our approaches to cuisine and dining should include a great mixture of experimentation together with tradition, creativity with temperance, and common intuition with culinary instruction. Reading Hartshorne in this way, it would seem that achieving a fine and beautiful balance is the goal to which we should aspire.

The Affective Continuum. One of the most intriguing but certainly the least well-known aspects of Hartshorne's philosophy is his understanding of the "affective continuum." He developed this doctrine in his first original monograph, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (1934). His goal was to demonstrate the actuality of what he called "affective tone" and Whitehead termed "feeling-value." Hartshorne felt that the implications of his study, which he carried out with five distinct but interrelated theses, were broad, relevant to many disciplines, and presented

. . . one coherent theory [that] makes possible a binding-together of the results of many distinct lines of inquiry, embracing pure geometry, aesthetics, everyday social experience, biology, metaphysics, and religious experience, into a sweeping generalization capable of manifold empirical verifications as well as applicable to the clarification of numerous philosophical paradoxes.³⁰

Notably, the study was less a response to Whitehead's philosophy than to the psychological studies Hartshorne undertook from his noted Harvard professor, Leonard Thompson Troland.

Hartshorne's book explores a basic empirical question: how does one classify the knowledge gained from sensation? Even before asking this question, he had already taken a significant first step by rejecting the classical sensory theory that divides sensation into three distinct categories: (1) primary sensory qualities, which are those that are metaphysical, deal with "spatio-temporal configuration and motion,"³¹ and cannot be directly and *consciously* perceived in themselves; (2) secondary sensations, which are felt immediately through the five senses; and (3) tertiary qualities, which are reflective interpretations that give aesthetic-rational

³⁰Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 8-9. For an assessment of Hartshorne's argument, see Viney and Hospers.

³¹Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 298.

structure to the feelings derived from sensation. When asking his question of sensation's classification, Hartshorne had already made a major pre-supposition regarding the unity or continuity between sensation (secondary qualities) and feeling (tertiary qualities).³²

The counterpart to Hartshorne's theory of the affective continuum is his rejection of the position that associational theories of sensation, in themselves, are wholly or sufficiently explanatory of sensation. The associational theories of that time did not accept the possibility of any essential or innate continuity between sensing and feeling. Rather, they attributed all correlation between these two qualities to learning processes. The association of a particular sensation with a specific feeling could be learned through one's own direct experiences, from the observation of others' experiences, or even from familial or cultural traditions. Examples might include a child equating happiness with yellow because it reminds her of daisies on a sunny day and a whole culture accepting that a certain color is morbid or funereal (e.g., black in the West, and white in the Far East). Against the associational view, Hartshorne maintains that

. . . "affective" tonality, the aesthetic or tertiary quality usually supposed to be merely "associated with" a given sensory quality is, *in part at least*, identical with that quality, one with its nature or essence. Thus the "gaiety" of yellow . . . is the yellowness of the yellow. . . .³³

Significantly, while Hartshorne rejected associationism as a sufficient explanation for sensation-feeling qualities, his qualification in the quote above—i.e., "in part at least"—indicates that he did recognize the validity of these associations.

Hartshorne did recognize that his own position would ultimately be difficult, if not impossible, to prove with exact data and in precise language. In his estimation, however, it would be a far graver mistake to exclude the presence of a direct and essential link between sensation and feeling. Furthermore, he felt that the doctrine of the affective continuum, as an emergent theory, better met the modern scientific criteria of simplicity and continuity (e.g., the philosophies of Ockham and Darwin).

³²It should be noted here that, while Hartshorne maintains that all sensation involves feeling or is suffused with affect, the converse is not true: that is to say, not all feeling or emotion involves sensation.

³³Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation*, 7. Italics mine.

In the course of his book, Hartshorne eventually considered the emotional impact of sense qualities relative to each of the five senses. Here we consider only the implications that the doctrine of affective continuum has for fine cuisine. With regard to the question “Why cuisine?” Wesleyans can use this notion to respond affirmatively that excellent food provides for emotional health as well as for physical wellness and aesthetic pleasure. In offering up specific foods with pleasing flavors, odors, textures, colors, and presentation, we elicit positive emotions from our table-fellows. These emotions come directly from the food-experience, but Hartshorne’s theory also permits us to allow enjoy pleasurable emotional associations from our food.

Food, like music, dance, sculpture, architecture, and the other visual arts, can serve as a language of the emotions. Analogously, cuisine can act as a sort of spiritual language. Obviously, a “recommended list” of spiritual food will not supplant scripture with scallops, the Bible with bouillabaise, or Christ with Creole crawfish etouffee. But cuisine and the practice of hospitality can and should supplement the full smorgasbord of religious experience.

The Aesthetic Argument for God’s Existence. Hartshorne’s defense of the ontological argument for God’s existence is widely recognized.³⁴ The fact that this is but one of six *a priori* arguments that he employed in a global or cumulative case is less well-known.³⁵ Of these six cases, his aesthetic argument has received the least amount of attention. This is somewhat surprising since it is his most unique contribution to theistic proofs and it reflects his life-long interest in aesthetics. Hartshorne terms this a “normative” argument, and its form, which is similar to the epistemic argument, runs thus:

³⁴See, for example, Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), and *Anselm’s Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God’s Existence* (La Salle: Open Court, 1965).

³⁵The definitive work on the global argument is Donald Wayne Viney, *Charles Hartshorne and the Existence of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). Viney reveals that the basic idea of the global argument, given definitive form in the chapter “Six Theistic Proofs” in *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (1970), was hinted at in several of Hartshorne’s earlier works, including *Man’s Vision of God* (1940), *Philosophers Speak of God* (1953), and, finally, in *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (1967), in which the phrase “global argument” appears for the first time (*Ibid.*, 20-21).

- A1 There is no beauty of the world as a (*de facto*) whole.
- A2 There is a beauty of the world as a whole, but no one enjoys it.
- A3 There is a beauty of the world as a whole, but only non-divine beings enjoy it.
- T There is a beauty of the world as a whole and God alone adequately enjoys it.³⁶

Is Hartshorne’s aesthetic argument for God useful in a second area, such as a theology of hospitality? I believe so, and with regard to cuisine, I propose revising the argument in the following manner:

- cA1 There is no value/beauty in cuisine on/for the whole.
- cA2 There is value/beauty in cuisine on/for the whole, but no one enjoys it.
- cA3 There is value/beauty in cuisine on/for the whole, but only non-divine beings enjoy it.
- cT There is value/beauty in cuisine on/for the whole and God alone adequately enjoys it.

This “plan-over” argument, with some assistance from the famous cultural matrix that H. Richard Niebuhr proposes in *Christ and Culture*, helps us understand possible responses to fine dining and can lead us toward a positive reply to the question, “Why cuisine?”

The basic issue in both first arguments (A1 and cA1) is the objective status of beauty. Hartshorne’s metaphysics requires him to reject subjectivism. Niebuhr describes a different type of response to objectivity in cA1, however, which he terms “Christ against Culture.” One holding to this view maintains that the proper relation to cuisine is one of ascetic opposition. Only Christian existence is authentic, and because this is a unique form of spiritual existence within—and against—the world, it is also to be anti-materialist. Here, then, while the objective Christian world is affirmed, the “carnal” world is rejected as being an illusion or a derivative corruption of the real.

In the second arguments, the matter is epistemic. In A1, beauty’s existence is accepted, but its essence cannot be known—unless by the implied divine Knower. The existence of that which is pleurably objective is also accepted in cA2, but here the epistemic leads to the moral: the pleasing essence of cuisine *could not* be known by those loyal to the

³⁶Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 287.

Kingdom of God. Niebuhr characterizes this approach as “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” which is epitomized by teachings that juxtapose the two Kingdoms (i.e., of God and of humanity). Suspicion of aesthetic value still runs high in this camp, and God’s aesthetic enjoyment of any aspect of creation may well be denied—with the exception of the purely spiritual, of course. Wesley’s aesthetic views have much in common with this tradition.

The third arguments propose a thorough sublimation of or immanence for the beautiful. In Hartshorne’s response to A3, however, we find that aesthetic value cannot be adequately enjoyed by humanity because beauty is disproportionately greater than what we can experience. This leads him to the conclusion of T: God’s *a priori* necessity. Niebuhr’s description of this response to culture—or, in our case, beauty—is the “Christ of Culture” approach, in which one promotes a correspondence between and harmonization of Christian and non-Christian cultures, and between the natural and supernatural. Although this position’s adherents would admit that culture is given its final form and confirmation in Christ, the overwhelming emphasis falls upon the presence of moral and spiritual significance within the natural world and human experience. For cuisine, this approach extends definite incarnational and sacramental value to food. It takes little effort to imagine how Wesley would respond to this notion!

Hartshorne’s argument in T for God’s existence and enjoyment of creation is, in my opinion, quite compatible with Niebuhr’s fourth category, “Christ transforms Culture.” We have seen that T does not preclude human aesthetic enjoyment, and so we might argue, *vis-à-vis* the doctrine of the *imago dei*, that humans are expected to take pleasure in Creation in a manner analogous to God’s own enjoyment of it. Certainly Niebuhr’s conversionist view of culture leaves him open to human enjoyment of life when it contributes toward a transformative end. While Niebuhr does, in fact, recognize that Wesley’s theology is transformational, “living from and toward God’s love in freedom from self,”³⁷ we have also seen that the evangelist consistently relativizes the aesthetic because of his great fear that the sensual can lure one away from the life of love. What Wesley seems to have missed is that, given the transformative nature of God’s

³⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 219.

love, it is actually love that relativizes and re-orientes the aesthetic, transforming it sacramentally to a sensual symbol of God's general providence of grace in and through creation. Gracious love provides both "freedom for" and "freedom from" the world. Thus, Niebuhr's (fourth) transformative approach, with a little help from Hartshorne's matrix, provides an excellent model for a Wesleyan appropriation of culinary culture if—and only if—Wesley's evangelistic zeal is blended and balanced in moderation with an Epicurean sense of taste.

Developing a Taste for God

I close with a few practical suggestions about how to increase fine cuisine in the diets of Christian hospitality that we Wesleyans can/should enjoy.

Culinary Instruction. For people who truly enjoy cooking and food, there is nothing better than having a master chef offer instruction on new culinary methods, food genres, and flavors within a communal cooking environment. In today's culture, a quick glance at book and magazine publications, specialty shops, websites, and entire satellite television channels dealing with cuisine all indicate that its popularity is, perhaps, second only to home improvement. Cuisine's inherent value is reason enough to make it part of our hospitality practices, but its broad appeal has extrinsic value as a way for churches to connect with people in their communities. Sponsoring a "how-to" day with the lead chef or cooking staff from a popular local restaurant is a great outreach opportunity, regardless of whether the event is held at the cook's restaurant, a community college, a communal kitchen, a parishioner's home, or a church kitchen.

Communal Field Trips. The average American today eats one of every three meals at a restaurant. Could there be a better way to incorporate fine cuisine into a church's fellowship calendar than to organize a monthly "field trip" to local establishments that offer new and exciting foods? Many restaurants are willing to handle larger groups at off-peak hours or offer group discounts for *price-fixe* menus. This, too, could be a good means for a small- to mid-sized church to become visible in the community . . . as long as a generous gratuity is paid!

Intentionally Fine Dining. Most local churches already have traditions concerning food and fellowship events. The menu offerings of some

of these occasions could be moved from traditional fare to that which highlights specific culinary genres (e.g., soups or seafood), themes (e.g., tastes of the eastern Mediterranean or Caribbean), or holidays and seasons (e.g., a Creole Fat Tuesday, a Irish St. Patrick's, or spring and fall specialties). International themes are a particularly easy and safe approach for churches that regularly host foreign missionaries. Three things are required: creativity, intentionality, and a willingness to try new things.

Community Cook-Off. Gone are the days of the Rotary or Kiwanis Club pancake feed in the city park. In some communities, even the annual BBQ competition might be passé. Nevertheless, for the church that is so inclined, the cook-off concept is another way to encourage culinary awareness and encounter the community. Here, again, there are numerous possibilities, but there are three keys to a good cook-off: excellent publicity, participant recruitment, and finding a community-centered theme. In-season produce, fish, game, or popular local foods would be a good place to start when considering such a theme.

WINDOWS OF INFINITE WELCOME: THE ICONIC NATURE OF HOSPITALITY

by
Greg Voiles

The practice Christian hospitality as well as the thought have both been the subjects increased study in the realms patristics and ecclesiological ethics in recent years. This renewal is marked importance for the life the Body Christ, particularly in the context western culture. In this essay I will explore the thought St. and the place the practice hospitality within his Trinitarian theology. I will particularly look at how theologically “makes space” for the practice hospitality as an avenue for the renewal the imago Dei or imago Trinitatis in humanity. This assumes a Trinitarian logic humanity’s participation in the Body Christ by and in the Holy Spirit. Within this vein’s Trinitarian logic participation, I will explore how in the practice hospitality the Body Christ, and individual members within Christ’s Body, become both mirrors and windows into the interior life the Trinity. I will show how for the Holy Spirit, through the practice hospitality, saturates the bodies the saints, making their lives “iconic.”

Thomism, Cappadocianism, and Mirroring Windows

Fritz Bauerschmidt, in his essay on persuasive Thomism within a postmodern context, quotes his fellow Roman Catholic and southern nov-

elist Flannery O'Connor on the occasion of her conversation with a friend in which she reflects on the reaction of folk after reading her novel *Wiseblood*. O'Connor told her friend that everyone who read her book "thinks I'm a hillbilly nihilist, whereas I would like to create the impression . . . that I am a hillbilly Thomist."¹ Along with Bauerschmidt and O'Connor, I would like to cast my lot in this way in relation to Thomism, the Cappadocians in general, and St. Gregory of Nyssa in particular.² Being such a Thomist and Cappadocian requires understanding that both have to do with how one's theological anthropology describes humanity. Bauerschmidt seems to be speaking about how one persuades others of the Christian vision once one has reached adulthood and received the ability to think and speak in a way that is theologically conscious. My journey began by experiencing an aspect of nature as a child. I was quite unaware of theological reflection at the time. This experience of creation in my native Tennessee is somewhat analogical to how Nyssen thinks of humanity.

When one goes to the rivers in my hometown of Jamestown, Tennessee, one is easily deceived when standing on the bank. As a child, I began to realize that the water is often so clear and clean that the bottom is clearly visible. Many a person has observed this, thinking that it was a shallow patch of river. I began to realize that fishermen and others often failed to see that what appears to be shallow water was in fact a window into a depth within whose life seemingly infinite amounts of fish and other organisms participate. If you're going to go fishing in a Tennessee river, you better know how to swim. But the water is more than a window into an expansive depth; it is a mirror that reflects the foliage and colorful beauty of trees on the hills surrounding the banks of the river. It is a mirror reflecting various sizes and colors of birds, squirrels, and the rich, glorious blue of that expansive, seemingly infinite sky. The river is a window and mirror, a mirroring window.

As one endeavors to swim the depths of the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa, the youngest and most philosophically sophisticated of the

¹As quoted in Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Shouting in the Land of the Hard of Hearing: On Being a Hillbilly Thomist," *Modern Theology* 20:1, January 2004, 165.

²Though many would doubtless say that being both a Thomist and Cappadocian simultaneously is quite impossible, I would disagree.

revered Fathers and Mother³ of the church known as the “Cappadocians,”⁴ one begins to find that for Nyssen the analogy of a “mirroring window” is an apt one for describing humanity as the image (eikon) of God. It is here that we must begin our study of hospitality as an “iconic” practice within the logic of Gregory’s trinitarianism. For hospitality is iconic only within the context of humanity as the eikon of the Triune God, which, for Nyssen, has meaning only within the understanding of humanity as created in the image of the ultimate and perfect eikon or image of the Father and the Logos, the Son who is the second hypostasis of the Trinity.

Humanity as Image of God (Trinity) and Eikon

As we embark on the journey through the creation account in Genesis we hear and see a God Who is Creator, an Artist, The Great Artist. This God of Israel, whom Moses finds to be YHWH, is the one who, as we read the account through the lens of Christ, is within his very being a harmonious Trinity. The story of creation renders the character of a God who, through our tutelage under Genesis and the ecumenical creeds, we come to see as one who creates worlds out of nothing and brings harmony out of chaos. This God separates the waters above from the waters below and begins to bring about a creation that is a harmonious symphony of water and land, plants and marine life, birds of the air and beasts of the field. In order to complete the creation symphony, God creates His Image or what Nyssen would term in Greek “Eikon.” Through this Eikon, humanity, indeed all creation would see a window into and a mirror that reflects the glory of the One who is the Creator, Conductor, and Sustainer of this symphonic harmony called creation.

For Gregory, the *Imago Dei*, this Eikon, is the essence of human nature. It is understood as implicating all of human nature, but, strictly

³Along with Jaroslov Pelikan, I number Basil and Nyssen’s sister Macrina among the Cappadocians, thus making four Cappadocians. *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁴The view that Nyssen is the most philosophically sophisticated of the four Cappadocians (the other three being Gregory’s older brother Basil of Ceasarea, his sister Macrina, and their friend Gregory Nazianzen) has become a common view.

speaking, is the dimension of human nature called “soul.” There is much room for misunderstanding here, particularly in the context of reasoning, since the influential church historian Adolf von Harnack sought to persuade us that there is a monolithic “Hebrew anthropology,” which connotes holism, that is corrupted by the early church, patristic and matristic theologians who contaminated this monolithic anthropology with Hellenism, thus bringing in a foreign dualistic anthropology into the Judeo-Christian tradition. While there are at times problematic elements in the patristic tradition, which arise from the Christian encounter with Hellenism (and Nyssen is not completely innocent here), the dichotomy of “Hebrew” vs. Hellenistic” is a thoroughly misleading argument and far too simplistic in its analysis of patristics/matristics. Predominantly, the Christian encounter with Hellenism is one in which, as Jaroslav Pelikan argues convincingly (particularly with the Cappadocians), patristic theology gleaned the good from Greek classicalism while transforming it in light of the Scriptural revelation. This tradition of reasoning has been and is being thoroughly dismantled, but still could lead us astray in exploring Nyssen’s theological anthropology.⁵

Nyssen’s theology of the *Imago Dei* is important for understanding humanity as well as delimiting the boundary between Creator and the creature, which will become important as we later narrate Nyssen’s understanding of *theosis* or the uniting of humanity to the Trinity through the Incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Spirit. For Nyssen, to express the identity of humanity/ the human as image or *eikon* of God is to speak of a creature that is *like* God and *unlike* God. Again, while the whole of human nature is implicated in the human as *eikon* of God the dimension of soul is the locus and ultimately the bearer of the image. Similar to the way the rays of the sun are distinguishable from the nova that is the energetic center and animator of the rays, yet can never be separated from it, the body, from creation, birth, death, resurrection, to eschaton can never be separated from the soul.

⁵It is interesting that one of the most significant figures to begin dismantling this notion of a “pure Hebraism” in scripture, uncorrupted by outside influence of alien cultural/philosophical/theological influences, was not a patristic scholar. Rather, it was the influential OT scholar James Barr. I raise this issue, not to make it the primary focus of this essay, but only to begin to rid the path of understanding Nyssen of a significant roadblock. For resources which deconstruct this argument of pure Hebrew theological anthropology corrupted by Christian Hellenism, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*.

Gregory, no less than the other Cappadocians, realized that for classical philosophy, natural theology, or revealed theology, one could never adequately describe the cosmos existing in time and space without articulating the nature of humanity. In *On the Making of Humanity* Nyssen, in giving tribute to his brother Basil says:

“The only one who has worthily considered the creation of God is someone who has truly been created in conformity with [kata] God, and whose soul is fashioned in the image of the Creator—Basil, our common father and teacher, who by his own speculation made the sublime working of the universe as cosmos generally intelligible.”⁶

Gregory is describing how, in the process of working out his cosmology a thinker like Basil became aware of the fact that the anthropological issue was one that continued to arise and must be given due attention in its own right. However, it was the younger Gregory who would give such systematic attention to this area.⁷ The human, as an interwoven being of body and soul, was, for Gregory and the other Cappadocians, microcosm. In *On the Soul and Resurrection* Gregory’s sister Macrina says to Nyssen, “It has been said by wise men that man is a little world [mikros tis kosmos] in himself and contains all the elements which go to complete the universe.”⁸ The human is a composite being or, better yet, a psychosomatic unity of soul and body; soul, which penetrates every particle of the body yet transcends the body, thus mirroring God, Whose Presence penetrates and animates all Creation yet transcends all Creation.⁹ The difference is of course that God transcends the Creation infinitely and is Other than the creation while the human soul, for Gregory and the best of orthodox/catholic theology, is always in relation to the body. Rowan Williams states it well when he interprets Nyssen’s understanding of soul, in *On the Making of Humanity* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*, by saying,

For Gregory, there is, we could say, no such *thing* as the soul in itself: it is always implicated in contingent matter, and even

⁶Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Humanity*, as translated by Jaroslav Pelikan in *Christianity and Classical Culture*. I use Pelikan’s translation here for its freshness of insight through its well-chosen English grammar.

⁷*On the Making of Humanity*, NPNF, 1.

⁸Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, NPNF,

⁹Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 24.

its final liberation for pilgrimage into God depends, as we have seen, upon the deployment and integration of bodiliness and animality.¹⁰

So the transcendence of the body by the soul is *analogical*, as in Aquinas, in its similarity to God's transcendence of creation, rather than one of *degree*, as in Duns Scotus.¹¹ It is not univocal, which is in keeping with the Cappadocian emphasis on the *apophatic* character of our knowing and speaking of the Being of God.

To make sense of this microcosmic, psychosomatic unity that is the nature of humanity, we need look no further than the account in the Genesis narrative of the fashioning of the human from the clay or dust of the earth. This fashioning of the human takes place subsequently to the creation of all the other of God's creatures. The human is unlike animal life in that humanity was created out of divine deliberation and out of preexistent material.¹² Thus, as Jaroslav Pelikan (while blending direct quotes from Macrina and Gregory into his statement) says:

Therefore, "every single form of life, both that of plants and that seen in brutes,"¹³ could be found somewhere in the human frame; yet there was far more to human life than all of those forms put together. That made man the microcosm "second to none among the wonders of the world, perhaps even greater than any of those known to us, because no other existing thing, except the human creation"¹⁴ could lay claim to having been made like to God.¹⁵

¹⁰Rowan Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lionel Wickham and Caroline Bammel (New York: E. J. Brill, 1993), 244.

¹¹For a sophisticated and compelling discussion of the necessity of speaking analogically of God's being in comparison to our being, particularly in comparing Thomas and Duns Scotus, see Catherine Pickstock's beautiful book, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. See also Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, London: Routledge, 2002, as well as the variety of writings by the proponents of the "Nouvelle Theologie," particularly the works of Etienne Gilson and Henri de Lubac.

¹²*On the Making of Humanity*; NPNF, 3:1.

¹³Macrina ap. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, NPNF. As quoted in Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 123.

¹⁴*On the Making of Humanity* pr., NPNF. Translated by Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 123.

¹⁵Pelikan, *Christianity and Class*.

This “far more to human life” of Nyssen’s theological anthropology is rendered through the action of God upon the clay that He has fashioned into the human, God breathes into the earth the breath of life and the human becomes a *living soul*.¹⁶ Humanity was created by God as a comixture of soul and body, with its senses. This subsequent “closer look” at the creation of the human in Genesis brings this into bold relief. The body is signified by the earth that the Creator took and the soul is signified by the breath that God infused into the earth to cause it to live. Notice that both the earth (body) and breath (soul) are created by God (though soul, pace Williams, is more to be understood as power, *dunamis*, or capability, rather than a *thing*), thus they both are, as well, sustained by and in God. However, the special attention given by the Creator in breathing life into the earth shows the elevated status and importance of this “life” with which the earth is infused. Gregory, like a number of the other Fathers such as, for instance, Maximus the Confessor understood the body and soul to be complementary and constituting humanity in a way as to render them inseparable.¹⁷ But the breath in the earth points to more than the inseparability of body and soul, it also points to the fact that humanity only truly exists as human through *participation* in God. In other words the human is created for communion with God. The fact that the *eikon* (and the whole creation) has being through participation in God is the prevalent view of the Christian East (as well as Western Fathers such as Augustine and Aquinas) and Gregory’s writings are shot through and through with this assumption.¹⁸ Humanity’s nature as uniting body and soul was, pointing toward the creation and destiny of the cosmos, due to, according to Nyssen, the place humanity occupies in the Divine Economy, and thus in the cosmos. Being created in the “image and likeness” of God is both a gift and a task to be realized.¹⁹

¹⁶For a fascinating study of the gift of the “breath of God” in the human, see Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004).

¹⁷John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordam University Press, 1974, 141. Just one example of this can be found in *On the Making of Man* where Gregory is discussing the difference between creatures like humanity and God. Whereas God is Goodness in Himself, creatures only attain goodness in as much as they *participate* in the Goodness of God. *On the Making of Humanity*, 16.12, *NPNF*, 405b.

¹⁸Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 138.

¹⁹Meyendorff, 140.

It is important for Gregory to describe humanity not as two “parts” but as two dimensions for, in *On the Making of Humanity*, he sees humanity as the fullness of Creation, the one in whom God brings together “heaven and earth.” The human as eikon is one who participates in the divine, incorporeal order as well and the material order of creation, with the other creatures such as plants and animals. The body and soul language acknowledges humanity’s simultaneous participation in both orders as the “fullness of creation.” The soul is the mirror of the Infinite Trinity and the body is the “mirror of the mirror” which is to say that the body mirrors the soul. However, the body also mirrors the creation in its materiality and senses. Humanity as microcosm is the creation who is the convergence of the nonrational and rational orders for the purpose of uniting and redeeming both the spiritual or intelligible and corporeal realms of creation. Gregory notes that the order of creation in the Genesis narrative parallels the physical and metaphysical order of the creation or universe. So humanity is the center or fullness of creation, she has a special place in the Divine Economy.²⁰

For Gregory humanity the eikon is created with both a *structural* and a *moral* likeness to God. Among the structural capacities of the human as eikon are rationality, which leads to self-governance, reasoning (logos), discernment (diakrisis), and contemplation (all of these empower the human to know the goods of the sensible realm as well the goods of the heavenly or divine realm). To these Macrina adds incorporeal nature, weightlessness, intellect, and transcendence of spatial dimension.²¹ The body, because it is penetrated and animated by the soul, bears the trappings of the soul as eikon of God. The soul’s rational nature is shown in the outward form of the body (pointing once again to the human as microcosm). Two examples of Nyssen’s thinking here are the human’s hand and mouth construction. The hands are made to serve reason in that they enable the human to pick up objects and examine them as well as think through writing.²² The hands also enable the human not to have to drag

²⁰*On the Soul and Resurrection*, NPNF. For a helpful discussion of Gregory’s hierarchy of being, of which humanity is the height, and how this is connected to the “trichotomous” nature of the soul, see J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 65-74.

²¹Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 23.

²²*On the Making of Humanity*; 8.2, NPNF, 393a.

around food by the teeth and thus there is room for the mouth to be constructed in a way that allows for articulate speech.²³

The human as *eikon* also bears a *moral* likeness to God in which humans may participate in the Beauty of God's perfection. Gregory describes God's perfection in terms of the word *arête*, excellence, valor, or virtue. This word arises from Greek culture and is used in describing Homeric heroes, statesmen, and gods from the pantheon. Gregory describes the Christian God's *arête* however, in scriptural language. God's *arête* is righteousness (*dikaiousune*), purity (*katharotes*), blessedness (*makariotes*), and impassibility or sinlessness (*apatheia*, which connotes God's freedom from necessity). Unlike mortal humans for whom emotions such as anger and lust often hinder or obscure their ability to apprehend the Good, God is never swayed from the Good, which resides in His very being.²⁴

Even as the beauty of God's nature is contemplated in terms of His virtues, so too our royal lineage is denoted by the presence of the same virtues as those of our archetype.²⁵

The highest and supreme virtue of all God's perfections is love (*agape*). If we do not have love the stamp or image on our nature is distorted and corrupted.²⁶ Love is the essence of the moral image of God. However, none of the virtues that constitute the moral and structural likeness of humanity to God are unalterably fixed in us. Rather, our likeness to the Trinity is dependent upon our *participation* in the goodness of God. Nyssen states:

He made human nature participant in all good; for if the deity is the fullness of good, and this [human nature] is His image then the image finds resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.²⁷

As we said earlier however, the *Imago Dei* in Nyssen's thought not only points to the reality that humans reflect God's image back to God, one another, and the rest of creation; we are like God. But it also

²³*On the Making of Humanity*; 8.8, NPNF, 394b-395a.

²⁴Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 26.

²⁵Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 26.

²⁶*On the Making of Humanity*; 5, NPNF, 391b.

²⁷*On the Making of Humanity*; 16.10; NPNF, 405b.

describes how we are *not* like God. Not only is God incorporeal, whereas we are corporeal, God the Trinity is also *infinite* while we are finite. As the eikon humanity, we are ontologically different from our Archetype. We as finite creatures only live eternally through our participation in the Life of the One Who is Infinite Life. We also are different in that our desires are not only made up of the desire for the goods of the intelligible, or divine realm, but also, given our nature as psychosomatic unity, the goods of the sensible realm. We must realize that our desires have been (and here Nyssen is similar to Augustine) corrupted by the Fall. There is a need for the healing of our desire.

A quick word about desire, it is clear that in Gregory's writings there is an ambiguity in regards to desire. Much of this has to do with his inconsistency in his use of language in regards to the desire and, more specifically, passion. While this is certainly the case I agree with position held, more or less by J. Warren Smith, Sarah Coakley, and others, that as Nyssen's corpus unfolds there is a relatively coherent vision that comes to the surface. Namely, that, though there are inconsistencies, Nyssen generally seems to see desire as neutral, what constitutes the goodness or evil of desire is determined by its *telos*. In a somewhat similar fashion to Augustine, for Gregory, when our *telos* or goal is the beatific vision, where God is our central desire, our other desires are brought into harmony and thus can be described in the language of virtue. However, if our desire, as tends to be the case after the Fall, is placed not on God but upon some other lesser good, Gregory tends to describe that desire as vice or passion, though there are times when it even seems that passion is neutral and determined good or evil by its *telos*. The human is an erotic being.

Mirroring the Infinite: Nyssen's Spectral Trinitarian Economy

With all Nyssen's use of the language of mirror and light, it becomes clear that for Nyssen the economy of creation is in some sense a "spectral" economy, or one having to do with the finite "mirroring" the infinite. However, this economy is more than simply a baptized Platonism. Nyssen's vision of Genesis as a story of humanity as the mirror of the infinite God because he reads the narrative through the lens of the incarnation of the second hypostasis or person of the Trinity, the Eternal Son of the Father, which is to say that Gregory sees the story through the language of, hears the story through the music of, the Holy Trinity of Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. For it is as Nyssen contemplates the interior life of the Trinity that he finds the root of the spectral economy, the Spectral Economy that is the interior life of the Trinity. This forms Gregory's speech about the Trinity, no matter how apophatic and analogical our language about the Trinity must be.

David Bentley Hart's luminously beautiful reading of Nyssen, upon which my reflections rely, reminds us that swimming in and speaking of the Economy (which of course is inadequate when speaking of the interior life of the God who is infinite and unbounded) of the Triune God is dancing within a mystery that is as Karl Barth has somewhere said, like trying to paint a bird in flight, a reality of which our language must be at an infinite remove. And yet our language lies with the "language" that is God's own speaking of Himself, in which we participate and, though at an infinitely analogical distance, we must, by grace, speak. In speaking of this God, Gregory is clear that this God is Love and declares:

. . . the divine nature exceeds each [finite] good, and the good is wholly beloved by the good, and thus it follows that when it looks upon itself its desires what it possesses and possesses what it desires, and receives nothing from outside itself . . . the life of that transcendent nature is love, in that the beautiful is entirely lovable to those who know it (and God does know it), and so this knowledge becomes love (agape), because the object of his recognition is in its nature beautiful.²⁸

This passage is essentially Trinitarian grammar. It is safe to interpret the progression from the divine nature's infinite source, through God's knowing himself, with this recognizing being "converted" into delighted agape as a description of how the God, Who is One, in his infinite simplicity, eternally conceives his equally infinite eikon (image), thus knowing himself completely, perfectly in his Logos, and thus willing himself eternally with an infinite love, and so completing, in the movement of the Spirit, his Trinitarian life.

This is, after all, entirely in keeping with the venerable Cappadocian insight that in God—*ad extra* and so, necessarily, *ad*

²⁸*On the Soul and Resurrection*, as translated by David Bentley Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*," in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Oxford, UK, 2003), 113.

intra—all is inaugurated in the Father, effected in the Son and perfected in the Spirit.²⁹

This description of the simplicity of God's nature within the Trinitarian relations as an infinitely accomplished act of knowledge and love, the completely perfect coincidence of desire and possession, is in keeping with Nyssen's insight that the generation of the Logos or the Son is directly from the Father, while the Spirit's procession is from the Father *through* the Son. For God (and we in our internal unity and exterior relations, however distant or sinful, are an analogy of this in the Trinity), in understanding the simplicity of his essence, there is an absolute simultaneity and coincidence of relation and unity. God is One because each Person of the Holy Trinity, in the circle of God's glorious knowledge and love of his own goodness is a "face" that is always wholly God, in the full depth of his "personality."³⁰

According to David Bentley Hart the analogy of "the mirror" is the motif that, more than any other, pervades Nyssen's thought. Depths are created by the light which gathers on the surface, depths where there were previously none, and the surface is that from which the light is reflected back to the source of its radiance. For Nyssen, all knowledge consists in contemplation (*theoria*) of the reflected, and in some mysterious way or sense this is true even within the life of the Triune God. The Son (Logos) is the eternal *eikon* within Whom the Paternal Arche, the Father, contemplates and loves his essence within the glorious light of the Spirit. So the Father can never be conceived without the Son, which is consistent with the Eastern theology of painted icons, for if he were alone he would be devoid of wisdom, truth, holiness, and light, which points further to the fact that the Son is contemplated in the light or glory of the Spirit. Hart's reflection here is worth quoting at length,

This "mirroring" is that one original act of knowledge in which each of the Persons shares; the Only Begotten, says Gregory, who dwells in the Father, sees the Father in himself, while the Spirit searches out the deeps of God. God himself is, one is tempted to say, an eternal play of the invisible and the visible, the hidden Father made luminously manifest in the infinite icon of his beauty, God "speculating" upon himself by

²⁹Hart, 114.

³⁰Hart, 116.

way of his absolute self-giving in the other. And it is from this original “circle of glory” that the “logic” of created being unfolds: a specular ontology, according to which creation is constituted as simply another inflection of an infinite light, receiving God’s effulgence as that primordial gift that completes itself in summoning its own return into existence. Creation is only as the answer of light to light, a created participation in the self-donating movement of the Trinity, existing solely as the manifestation—the reflection—of the splendor of a God whose own being is manifestation: recognition and delight.³¹

For Gregory even the material world is subsumed in the specular economy of light. Apart from this reflex of light there is no world to speak of. The ontology of the world is such that, being continuously changing, it is in absolute contrast to God and yet on the other hand, because it is constant in this changing, it mirrors, through its awe inspiring magnitude and inscrutability, the majesty and incomprehensibility of God.³² This beauty that endures in the creation’s unceasing becoming excites in the soul a longing, a desire for the infinite beauty it reflects.³³ In the created world humanity can find an image of itself. Creation becomes, in the tradition of the theology of the painted icon, a “window” through which humanity is drawn to God.

The spiritual or heavenly goods are, however, an even more specular reality, and this of course is the highest desire of humanity. As was noted earlier, the Fall has drawn our desire away from God. As important as the creation is in mirroring God’s beauty and thus enflaming desire in us for God, its drawing is inextricably bound to its reflection of the Logos, Who, in order to redeem our desire that has fallen into sin because of our refusal of the life of the beatific vision, has taken on our flesh. So the Son, the perfect Eikon of the Father becomes Flesh in order, through His Flesh, to draw humanity and thus all creation back to God, back into life in the Trinity. This unity of humanity with God and, consequently, all creation with God, is accomplished in the One in Whom heaven and earth are eternally joined, Jesus the Christ. In his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension we perfectly and definitively see the beauty of God mir-

³¹Hart, 118.

³²Hart, 118. Here Hart is reflecting on Nyssen’s *Contra Eunomium*.

³³Hart, 118.

rored. And through this mirror that is the Incarnate Christ, we are drawn back into the life of the Trinity. This points to the fact that humanity, as the fallen but restored eikon in Christ, is nothing, ideally or collectively (just as the world is nothing apart from its place within the specular economy) apart from its capacity or power to reflect or display in itself the form and fashion of its Creator. And through Christ, the God-Human, this

. . . final beauty—this unveiling of the divine likeness—can be glimpsed even now in the church, which Gregory describes as the mirror in which the face of the sun of righteousness, Christ, has become visible within creation, to the wonder and enlightenment even of the heavenly powers.³⁴

**Mirroring Windows of Infinite Welcome:
Theosis as Epectasy, the Soul's Eternal Movement
(Participation) in(to) the Hospitality of the Trinity**

In *On the Making of Humanity* Gregory rejoices in the fact that God is the model host Who, in waiting to create humanity until the sixth day:

. . . decked the habitation with beauties of every kind, and prepared this great and varied banquet, then introduced humans, assigning to them as their task not the acquiring of what was not there, but the enjoyment of the things which were there. For this reason He gives to humanity as foundations the instincts of a twofold organization, blending the Divine with the earthly, that by means of both humans may be naturally and properly disposed to each enjoyment, enjoying God by means of a more divine nature, and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them.³⁵

And it is here that we come upon the fact that, just as God made space in creation for humanity to enjoy the divine and earthly goods and be the fullness of creation, through whom the divine and material realms of creation could participate in Him, so the Trinity, through the Incarnation of the Son, once again *makes room* for us in the divine life. It is through Christ that we as His body, the unity in Him of souls forgiven of sin and

³⁴Hart's interpretation of Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in Hart, 119.

³⁵*On the Making of Humanity*, as quoted in *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, ed. Amy G. Oden (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 284-285.

whose desires are being healed through Christ, eternally move into the hospitality of the Trinity because of our desire for God, which has been enflamed once again, through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

For Nyssen, the restoration of our desire for the beauty of God in Christ sets us once again into an eternal movement into the life of the Trinity, for we are drawn by the desire for God's beauty. In fact, through our being united to God through Christ, in the Spirit, our bodily desires begin to be harmonized with the desire for God, such that our bodily desires begin to become once again, rather than a hindrance of our desire for God, an avenue through which we experience God by our bodily desires our senses in our sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, the image that is the fellow humans we do not see as the Body of Christ, and the rest of the creation. Our bodily desires become sublimated and ordered by our desire for God such that they lift the soul higher into God. This eternal movement into God is what Gregory calls *epectasy*. This is his way of describing what other mothers and fathers refer to as *theosis*, or the uniting of our humanity, the broken eikon to God, through Christ. The famous patristic formula, which communicates this dynamic life, is articulated by Irenaeus and others as. . . ." He become human (without ceasing to be God) so that we could become divine (without ceasing to be human).

As noted above, if this eternal movement is through Christ in the Spirit into the God who is Trinity, we are eternally moving into the hospitality of God, the God who makes room for us in the Glory of the Divine life and love eternally mirrored between. This Triune Love is the infinite depth in which all things live move and have their being. The beautiful thing about humanity as eikon or mirror, as long as we contemplate what is beautiful, is that we transform into the image of that which we contemplate. So when we draw near to Christ we become beautiful because we reflect the beauty of the Trinity, and through epectasy, the more beautiful we become, the more beauty we will desire.

Conclusion

This means that, if epectasy, or theosis is a participation in the hospitality of God, we, as His eikon, will become more and more hospitable for, desiring to see Christ, we will be reminded of Mt. Where Jesus comes to us as we welcome the other. We will desire to contemplate the beauty of God through our fellow humans. In participating in the Hospitality of

the Trinity, through Christ, in the Spirit we will make space in our lives, in our conversation, in our homes, at our tables for the other, the mirror, the windows through which we see God's beauty, the mirrors which reflect Trinitarian Glory and often this will be the least of these, those who are different from us, those we do not like. Those, as Craig Keen has said somewhere, who are the poor, the oppressed, the dead and the damned. May we as Christ's Body immerse ourselves in this eikonic practice. May our lives as the Body and individual bodies be the mirrors of the Infinite Hospitality of the Trinity. May we as these mirrors which create an expansive depth be the eikonic windows into the Kingdom where . . . the poor are blessed, the hated are loved, the naked are clothed, the sinners are forgiven . . . and the dead are raised. . . . Amen.

WORLD CONQUEST: THE MISSIONARY STRATEGY OF JOHN ALEXANDER DOWIE

by

D. William Faupel

In 1885, John Alexander Dowie, a former Congregational Minister who for ten years had traveled throughout Australasia as an independent evangelist, began to think globally in terms of Christian mission. His vision was in part stimulated by an invitation he had received from William Boardman inviting him to attend the International Conference on Divine Healing and True Holiness in London, England, in the summer of that year. He desperately wanted to go but the timing was wrong. He felt he needed to remain in Australia and New Zealand a few more years to solidify his gains and firmly establish several churches that he had birthed. He wrote Boardman declining the invitation, but stating that he planned to visit England in three years.¹

The next day Dowie recorded in his diary how this vision for world evangelism came to him. That night, after writing the letter, he had taken a long walk while in meditation and prayer. He looked up into the heavens and then wrote:

The Southern Cross hung low in the sky. At its foot was the blackest place in all the heavens, like a rent without a star. As I looked into it, the misery, the shame and the horror of sin and disease and death and hell seemed to be buried there, at the foot of the cross. But while I continued to gaze, its darkness,

¹Gordon Lindsay, *The Life of John Alexander Dowie* (Shreveport, LA: Voice of Healing Publishing Company, 1951), 85.

its stillness appalled me. Then suddenly the earth seemed to be vocal. I could hear the wail of pain and the cries of the dying, rising from all the continents, swelling up from all the cities and hamlets and villages and solitudes, from ten thousand times ten thousand homes where babes in mothers arms, and children, lay dying, breaking loving hearts. . . . And as I looked I knew that I had to carry the Cross of Christ from land to land, and bid a sin-stricken and disease-smitten world to see that the Christ who died on Calvary had made ATONEMENT FOR SICKNESS AS WELL AS FOR SIN, AND THAT WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED.²

The vision took root. Three years later, in 1888, he set sail, going by way of the United States. Upon arrival, he traveled up and down the Pacific Coast for two years. In 1890, he headed east, moving his headquarters from San Francisco to Chicago. With Chicago as his base, he held city-wide crusades throughout the rest of the United States and Canada, establishing branches of his Divine Healing Association and meeting with Keswick and Holiness leaders who co-sponsored his crusades.³

²Op. cit., 86.

³Dowie's ministry during his first two years in the United States is well documented. Upon his arrival in San Francisco in 1888, he continued publishing *The Leaves of Healing*, a monthly magazine directed primarily to minister to and publicize the work of the Divine Healing Association throughout Australasia. However, he also kept them informed of his work in the United States. At the end of each of his first two years he published a volume in which he summarized the results of his campaigns. He entitled these respectively: *American First Fruits* and *Our Second Year Harvest*. From mid-1890 until September, 1894, when he resumed publishing *The Leaves of Healing* in Chicago, the published record of his national ministry is limited to scattered retrospective references. In the early 1894 issues it is clear that Dowie still retained cordial relations with denominational leaders. For example, he records that on September 9th he attended meetings at Janes Tabernacle in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, the campgrounds of the National Holiness Association. There he met with several Holiness leaders and was asked to speak at an evening service.

From the lists of ministers attending and the churches in which he held his meetings on the west coast, it is clear that Dowie's initial thrust was interdenominational in scope. All attending were drawn from both wings of the higher life movement, Keswick and Wesleyan. Dowie's initial goal for coming to the United States is clearly summed up in an article appearing in *The Salt Lake City Tribune*. He "came to this country for the purpose of combining the various organizations that claim to believe in healing by faith, and he had several conferences with

Like Boardman, Dowie was steeped in the Keswick tradition.⁴ It is clear that his initial plan was to call the emerging Holiness and Keswick groups together to form a gigantic movement to accomplish what he believed God was calling forth in the end time, the establishment of God's kingdom upon the earth. However, he discovered that, while the Holiness and Keswick leadership were willing to cooperate with him in city-wide crusades, they were not willing to join forces in a more tangible way or accept him as their leader. If this global vision was to happen, Dowie came to realize, he was going to have to do it on his own.⁵

I will look at Dowie's four-fold strategy of mission as he sought to establish Christ's kingdom on earth: (1st) he made his presence known through a ministry of Divine Healing; (2nd) he established and mobilized a global church; (3rd) he intended to establish planned communities throughout the world that would model "millennial life" and train Christian workers for evangelism; and (4th) he sought to use the secular press to draw people to his global communities.

Establishing an Independent Healing Ministry

John Alexander Dowie came to his ministry of healing when he was still a Congregational minister. Always a man in a hurry, he quickly climbed the ecclesiastical ladder. Within four years of his ordination, he was called to the prestigious Collegiate Church in Newtown, a suburb of Sydney, Australia. During his three-year ministry there, the church experienced a seventy-percent growth. During the winter of 1875-76 an epidemic swept through Australia. Its effects were devastating for Dowie and

recognized leaders of such organizations. But his efforts in this direction did not have the desired results. It was impossible for him to effect amalgamation or cooperation, and so he started out alone" (*The Salt Lake City Tribune*, July 28, 1906, 2, in *The Journal History Project*). This project was an ongoing scrapbook kept by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It contains clippings mainly from *The Salt Lake City Tribune* and the *Desert News* that are of interest to the church. The project is indexed and contains some 156 references to Dowie, whose ministry they followed very closely.

⁴Edith L. Blumhofer, "The Christian Catholic Church and the Apostolic Faith: A Study in the 1906 Pentecostal Revival," in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, edited by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Peabody, Ma: Hendrickson, 1985), 8.

⁵The author is currently working on a theological biography of Dowie. To date, the best study on his life and work is Philip L. Cook, *Zion City, Illinois: Twentieth-Century Utopia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

his congregation. Within a few months he buried forty members of his church. The sick and dying were everywhere. Exhausted from lack of sleep, he wrestled with the reality of death about him. How could a loving God allow this to happen?

Dowie was called upon to pray for a young lady of his parish who lay on her deathbed wracked with pain. White foam mixed with blood was oozing from her mouth. Seeing her thus, Dowie reached a breaking point. The doctor attending the girl said, helplessly, "Sir, are not God's ways mysterious?" With sudden insight, Dowie exploded in anger:

God's ways? . . . How dare you call into question God's way of bringing His children home to Heaven! No sir, that is the devil's work and it is time we called on Him who came to destroy the work of the devil. . . . No will of God sends such cruelty, and I shall never say God's will be done to Satan's works which God's own Son came to destroy.⁶

With this outburst, he prayed for the girl. Instantly the fever broke and she fell asleep. When she awoke, she was completely well. Following this incident, the scourge did not touch any other member of his parish.

A new world-view, a new perspective by which he read and understood the Scriptures, began to ferment. He soon realized that continued ministry within a denominational structure would restrict rather than enhance what God was calling him to do. Thus, by the end of 1876 Dowie launched out on his own in independent ministry.⁷ The next few years were a time of testing for Dowie. Although he often preached to large crowds, finances were not sufficient to meet expenses. Gradually he had to sell off all of his assets to meet his bills. His former colleagues denounced him. His in-laws turned against him, feeling that he was not taking adequate care of their daughter. The most bitter moment came in 1882 when his little daughter, Jeanie, died.⁸

⁶John Alexander Dowie, *He is Just the Same Today* (Chicago, IL: Zion Publishing House, 1899), 7.

⁷Ibid, 8-11. Dowie's decision was based in part on his analysis of church growth within his denomination. During the five years he served the denomination, it experienced total growth of 535 members or three persons annually for each of the 43 congregations. Almost half of that total growth came in the three churches that Dowie had served. Lindsay, 31, 45, 48.

⁸Lindsay, 64-71.

Dowie's fortune turned in 1883. He determined to make Divine Healing the central focus of his ministry. The change resulted in instant success. Crowds came in droves to hear his new emphasis. Testimonies of miraculous healing were received daily. Finances to fund an expanding operation began to flow. He established the Free Christian Church in Melbourne. From this base, he conducted healing crusades throughout Australia and New Zealand. To sustain the fruit of these campaigns, he founded the Diving Healing Association, and began to publish a new periodical, *The Leaves of Healing*.⁹

William Boardman's invitation to attend an International Conference on Divine Healing and True Holiness in 1885 gave Dowie a global focus. When he left Australia three years later, his plan was to establish a world organization directed from London, the center of the British Empire.¹⁰ Although he failed to get the major Holiness and Keswick groups to join him, he experienced such success in North America that he abandoned his intention to set up headquarters in England, making Chicago the base of his operations instead.¹¹

Part of the reason why he decided to establish Chicago as his new headquarters was the fact that the city was planning to host a World Fair. When it opened on May 7, 1893, Dowie was holding daily meetings in a newly built tabernacle nicknamed "the little wooden hut" across the street from the main gate. It proved to be a brilliant move. Visitors came from far and near, many in hope of receiving healing, others to scoff. While several would leave convinced that he was a fraud, others, with his literature in their hands, left devoted his disciples. Dowie's notoriety grew rapidly six months later. Sadie Cody, a relative of Buffalo Bill (whose Wild West Show ran nightly, just down the street) was instantly healed. She had been brought to the meeting in a stretcher. After Dowie prayed for her, she got up and walked away.¹²

Dowie soon required larger facilities. He leased the Chicago Auditorium from October 1895 to April 1896, with crowds averaging between 4,000-6,000. The following year he opened Central Tabernacle on Michi-

⁹Ibid., 72-75; and John J. Swain, "John Alexander Dowie: The Prophet and His Profit," *The Century Magazine*, Vol. XLIV (October 1902), 936.

¹⁰Lindsay, 85.

¹¹Ibid., 103.

¹²Ibid., 104, 137-140; Cook, 10-14.

gan Avenue. By 1896 he had established several branches in the city, hundreds across the United States, and dozens scattered throughout the world.¹³

Establishing a Universal Church

When Dowie established his International Divine Healing Association, he urged those who joined the Association to remain and work within their respective denominations. Nevertheless, his evangelistic/healing campaigns over the years resulted in a number of “branches” being formed that quickly began to function as independent local congregations. In some cases existing churches left their denominational affiliations to align themselves with his ministry. He kept in touch with these branches through *The Leaves of Healing*, periodic pastoral tours around the continent, and annual minister’s conventions in Chicago.

As Dowie’s fame grew, two things began to develop simultaneously. The radical form of Christianity that he practiced eventually alienated him from virtually all of the denominational leaders. They began to speak out against his form of Christianity in their respective periodicals. At the same time, the secular press, particularly in Chicago, led a sustained attack on his ministry for years, trying to drive him from the city. Dowie, however, was able to turn this free publicity to his advantage. Whether it be the earnest believer seeking healing, or the skeptical critic, many left his meetings as convinced disciples. These disciples in far-flung branches desired closer unity and more centralized control. Dowie felt the time had come to dissolve the Healing Association and launch new efforts.

Organizing the Christian Catholic Church. In the April 26, 1895, issue of *The Leaves of Healing*, Dowie signaled his intention to call for the establishment of a church based on apostolic principles. He proposed to call the new entity “The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church,” giving the following rationale:

Christ is the Living Stone . . . the Eternal Rock of Eternal Ages and the Church built upon Him; and no other Church than one so built can be the True Church. Hence it must be called Christian. . . . Second we must remember that every Christian is a citizen of Zion by birthright, for it is written, “ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy

¹³Cook, 15-16.

priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." God forbid that we should refuse citizenship in God's Zion on earth to a single citizen of the Heavenly Zion. Neither race nor colour, nor education, nor position, nor wealth can be a barrier to fellowship, for our Lord has said, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." There are no aliens amongst Christians. Believing that we, therefore, say the Church should be called Catholic, or as the word means, Universal, for we hold the right of every Christian to fellowship. . . . The form of organization of such a Church must be determined by the New Testament (Will) of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It must be "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Hence it should be called Apostolic. We therefore believe the Lord will . . . rapidly extend throughout the world a CHRISTIAN CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH.¹⁴

Scattered references to the church appeared in Dowie's periodical over the next several months. Finally, he called for a "General Conference of All Believers Interested in the Organization of the Christian Catholic Church." The church was formally organized on February 5, 1896.¹⁵ Dowie was named General Overseer. He appointed several Overseers to care for churches in various areas of the United States, and in those countries where churches had formed throughout the world. He ordained several elders to serve as head pastors of these churches, and many deacons to assist them. Other ministries that had been established under the Healing Association were brought under the direction of the church, including a publishing house, a healing home, a home for wayward women, and a newly formed training school. Through *The Leaves of Healing*, he informed the members of his former association that the time had come for them to chose. No longer could they retain membership in their for-

¹⁴*Leaves of Healing* (April 26, 1895): 479. When the church was established, the word "Apostolic" was absent until eight years later when, at the Feast of Tabernacles in July, 1904, Dowie was consecrated First Apostle of a restored Apostolic College.

¹⁵"Report of the First General Conference of All Believers Interested in the Organization of the Christian Catholic Church," *Leaves of Healing*, (January 31, 1896): 260-269; and "Report of the Second General Conference of All Believers Interested in the Organization of the Christian Catholic Church," *Leaves of Healing* (February 7, 1896): 276-286.

mer denominations if they were planning to join the Christian Catholic Church. Eligibility for membership was based on signing a simple statement of faith:

First: That we recognize the infallible inspiration and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice.

Second: That we recognize that no persons can be members of the church who have not repented of their sins and have not trusted in Christ for Salvation.

Third: That such persons must also be able to make a good profession, and declare that they do know in their hearts that they have truly repented, and are truly trusting Christ, and have a witness in a measure of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth: That all other questions of every kind shall be held to be matters of opinion and not matters that are essential to church unity.¹⁶

Equipping the Christian Catholic Church for Mission. For the next few years, Dowie again went on the road, holding evangelistic rallies and visiting all of branches of his growing organization, setting each local church in order. Although he made altar calls for salvation and healing, the focus of this phase of his ministry was apostolic teaching, seeking to ground each congregation in his understanding of the faith once delivered to the saints. Elders and deacons were ordained, and the local churches encouraged.

But Dowie recognized that, if his vision was to succeed, his work must be multiplied, not just by ordaining elders and deacons, but by equipping and mobilizing the laity as well. Basing his new initiative on the 10th chapter of Luke where Jesus sent forth the seventy, “two by two into every city and place where He was about to come,” Dowie formally established the Company of the Seventies, on September 18, 1898. Giving them their commission, he stated in part:

For years it has been our great desire to see this moment when having trained some hundreds of God’s own children, we should have the joy of sending them forth two by two into every street of this city of Chicago, knowing that the Lord wants to come into every street, and enter into every house in

¹⁶Ibid., 28.

this city. We have not been idle as individuals, but we have been looking forward to the time when the church could organize its bands, and send them forth to do this work.

You are witnesses as to what God has wrought in the Christian Catholic Church. . . . Hand your little message and say, "Peace be unto this house," and if they say, "Thank you," you say, "Would it be convenient for me to enter; will you let me tell you about Jesus?" And if you can get an entrance, go; and if you are shut out, go away, but be sure to come back again. Always come back, no matter how you are sent away.¹⁷

This idea was not original with Dowie. He observed such a movement at work when he visited the Mormons in Salt Lake City enroute to Chicago back in 1890. Commenting on his visit, he noted, "I studied the Mormon Church. I watched that Seventy Movement of theirs and saw that they were able to send out common, apparently illiterate men into the world, who were devoted to their church, and were willing to die for it."¹⁸ Dowie began with an army of six "Seventies," organized to be sent forth to every home in the city of Chicago. The city was organized into districts, which could be visited by two people during the course of one week. The number soon increased to over 3,000 in Chicago alone who devoted a part of their time each week going from house to house distributing materials, including copies of the *Leaves of Healing*. Soon the Seventies were operating in other major U. S. cities such as Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, and a host of smaller towns. The pattern was extended to Dowie's work in England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, France, South Africa, India, China, Australia, and New Zealand. The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church was ready to roll!¹⁹

Building a City of Refuge

Dowie, with his family and a few others, embarked August 11, 1900, on the first of two overseas tours. Unlike the tour he would take four years later, he provided little advance publicity. He had several reasons

¹⁷"Sending for the Seventies," *Leaves of Healing* (October 22, 1898): 999.

¹⁸"Opening of Zion's Hall of Seventies," *Leaves of Healing* (January 28, 1899): 255.

¹⁹Lindsey, 160.

for going. Like his travels across the United States in the years following the establishment of the Church, Dowie planned to visit his local congregations overseas, setting the church governance in order and encouraging the faithful. He planned a series of public meetings from November 4 through December 4 in the cities of Edinburgh, Belfast, Ballymena, Londonderry, Manchester, Leeds, London, and Paris. He looked forward to the time aboard ship as providing some much-needed rest. Most of all, however, he was recruiting his adherents to move to his new community, Zion, Illinois, which he was establishing north of Chicago near the Wisconsin border. In particular, he was looking for skilled laborers to train workers who would man the lace factory that he was moving lock, stock and barrel from Nottingham, England.²⁰

For years Dowie had been promising that he was going to establish a Christian city somewhere near Chicago. On New Year's Eve, 1899, he had disclosed its location. Zion soon became a bustling city of 8,000 residents with plans to grow to 200,000. A large hotel was built to house guests coming from great distances to attend the healing meetings. An educational system from elementary school through college was established. A tabernacle holding 5,000 people was under construction. Dowie dreamed that his city would become a center for both commerce and industry. A bank was created and a building society was formed. The city would boast both a publishing company and a daily newspaper. Large tracts of land surrounding the city were leased to farmers who were joining the church. Industries included: soap, candy, brick and furniture factories. A fishing industry was started on the Lake Michigan shore. The biggest coup of all was the lace manufacturing plant. The owner, Samuel Stevenson, had become a member of the church in England. He visited Dowie and decided to move the factory to Zion. The factory was to occupy eighty acres, employ fifty thousand workers, and be worth five million dollars.²¹

Zion City reflected Dowie's conviction that his movement was to prepare for the return of Christ. As much as possible, Zion was to reflect conditions expected during the millennium. All life within the city was structured in ways to encourage the desired behavior. Land, leased to each family for 1,100 years, could be revoked if a member of the family was

²⁰"Zion in Europe," *Leaves of Healing* (November 3, 1900): 35, and Cook, 36.

²¹Cook, 31-36, 55, 61-67, 71-77, 169.

caught violating one of the more serious codes. The city was divided into small sections for the purpose of weekly cottage prayer meetings. These occasions included not only a time for exhortation and prayer, but also for sharing personal struggles and victories.²²

Dowie's hope to lead his flock in the way of perfection was especially manifested in the educational system. Adherents recognized that their own spiritual progress had been hindered by worldly influences and their association with apostate denominationalism. In their children, they saw the possibility for greater advancement in the way of holiness. Everything possible was provided to insure their prodigy would become a royal generation. Dowie's concern for holy living took on a social dimension as well. He tried to instill in every convert the conviction that God is the Father and all humankind are our brothers and sisters. Mutual respect for all was taught. Policies were formed to discourage a multi-class society.

Concern for Jews and Blacks was stressed. Miscegenation was defended as a means to regain the purity and strength of the human race. Respect for his fellow men brought Dowie to advocate a pacifist position. A welfare system was devised to provide for the needs of the less fortunate. A home for orphans, a hospice for fallen women, and a retirement home were all centerpieces of the city. Zion was to become a model community to whom others could look, finding there a higher and better way for living.²³

Dowie envisioned that Zion would be the first of dozens of such communities that he would establish around the world. In a cooperative rather than coercive way, he believed that his movement would eventually transform society. It would ultimately prepare the way for the return of Christ to rule as head of a theocratic government.²⁴ Thus, the third prong in Dowie's missionary strategy was developing transformative communities from whence "the seventies" would be sent forth into the surrounding areas in witness was put in place.

Using the Devil to Accomplish God's Purposes

In October, 1903, Dowie launched a world tour beginning with a three-week crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Three

²²Rolvix Harlan, *John Alexander Dowie and the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion*, (Evansville, WI: Press of R. M. Antes, 1906), 36-39.

²³Cook, 91-97.

²⁴W. M. Hundley, "The Flag of the Salvation Army Eclipsed by the Standard of Zion City," *Physical Culture* (January, 1901), 274.

thousand of his “Companies of Seventy” renamed “Restoration Host” came with him for the meeting. During the day, they fanned out across the city passing out tracts, knocking on doors, inviting people to the evening meetings. Not surprisingly, the Garden was packed with over 5,000 people turned away nightly. From there, Mrs. Dowie, with a smaller party, went on to London, several cities on the European continent, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Dowie left for San Francisco, joining his wife in Australia and returning via India, Africa and Europe. Everywhere he went he held large rallies in the major cities, and then spoke privately to the community of followers he had in that part of the world.²⁵

Unlike his 1900 trip to Europe, Dowie showered the world with advance publicity, both through his newspaper, *The Zion Banner*, and periodical *The Leaves of Healing*, and by having his Regional Overseers alert the local press. For the New York Crusade, he prepared a 76-page program booklet that included the schedule of services, short biographies and photos of the leadership team, a brief hymnal, and advertising from all of Zion’s growing industries. In short, Dowie was making his triumphal entry upon the world stage, traveling in a private coach to New York provided by the courtesy of a major railroad president, engaging first-class staterooms on the ocean bound ships, and staying in first-class hotels at all of his destinations.

Dowie was well aware and counting on the fact that his actions would produce counter actions. In New York, the daily papers were a barrage of front-page headlines, declaring him a fraudulent huckster, criticizing his luxurious lifestyle, and claiming that the daily crowds coming to Madison Square Garden were mere curiosity seekers rather than potential converts. At the end of the three weeks, they gleefully declared his meetings a total failure.

In Australia, the adverse reaction intensified. Dowie landed in Sydney on February 13, 1904. *The Leaves of Healing* reported that Dowie’s son, Overseer Voliva, and other friends met him at the wharf. More ominously, it noted that there were also present “a large number of curious ones, and the notorious Sydney ‘larrikins,’ a very rough and dangerous element of the city.” These men attempted to surround Dowie when he came ashore, “but the “Zion Guard of the Sydney Branch” and a “few police” kept them at bay. Although persons attending the meetings were

²⁵Harlan, 36-39.

screened in an attempt to keep out those who might be prepared to disrupt the meetings, and a contingent of police and the Zion Guard were present, several of the “larrikins” managed to get in. Once the services were underway, there began “yelling that was like the howling of wild animals—yells of derision, impudence and ribald irreverence.” Dowie was able to quiet the crowd and the service proceeded. Halfway through his sermon, however, a crowd of outsiders who had no tickets to get in broke the police lines, “rushed to the doors and entered in defiance” and “massed behind the regular seats.”

After a few moments of continuous disorder, the disturbers began to roar out songs of the street, drowning out all efforts of the speaker to be heard. As the disorder was growing every moment, it was considered wise, in the interest of public safety, to close the meeting, which was done, amidst the hideous cries of the mob. Even after the meeting closed, their diabolical hatred and fury was not to be restrained, but found vent in a perfect bedlam of shrieks, yells, ribald songs and other disorder.²⁶

The Leaves of Healing was somewhat dismissive of the outbreak, attributing the riots to the Australian press whose reports were nothing but a “rehash of a number of lies that had been worn out and discarded by the American press sometime before.” The Sydney campaign was able to proceed with increased police protection and only occasional disruption. But it was only a foretaste of things to come. When the party reached the train station at Melbourne, they found a crowd of several thousand people, “mostly young men, some of them loafers and the professional ‘unemployed’ ” waiting for them. As the train came into view, “these young exponents of lawlessness began shouting, hooting and ‘boo-hooing.’ ” When Dowie got off the train:

Such a howling and “boo-hooing” arose that it seemed as if all the wild animals from the Australian bush had been turned loose on the platform of Spence Street Station. A concerted rush was made for the General Overseer from all sides, and blows were rained upon the little escort formed of the members of his party and Zion Guard. For a moment the mob

²⁶“Visitation at Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,” *Leaves of Healing*” (April 23, 1904): 7, 20.

brushed aside the police, and surged in a madly, roaring maelstrom about the Prophet of God and the little company around him. Then the police rushed in, and began striking and pulling right and left among the ruffians in an attempt to disperse them.²⁷

Dowie was able to get away unharmed. This time it was not just the press that had stirred up the crowd. He had sent several of his officers in advance to prepare for the Australian crusade. When they got to Melbourne, a large number of the denominational ministers of the city met together and decided that Dowie must not be permitted to obtain any foothold in the city.

As a result, the newspapers, the religious press, and many other influences in the city were bound together . . . a crusade of the most diabolical lying was begun by the two morning papers of the city . . . and by the so-called religious press. . . . Every fiendish concoction of mendacity from the very worst of the gutter press of America was eagerly taken up, added to, and published. . . . Everything possible was done by the press, by the pulpit and in private conversation to fill the people with the belief that John Alexander Dowie . . . was not only the prince of impostors, blasphemers and false prophets, but also the destroyer of domestic peace, the despoiler of widows and orphans, and the brutal, haughty, self-seeking oppressor of thousands of deluded, starving, freezing, dying victims in Zion City. . . . When the Masonic mobs of Sydney howled themselves hoarse in the Town Hall, and hunted the General Overseer for his very life in that city the Melbourne newspapers published accounts of the proceedings in such a manner that it could easily be read between the lines that this was the manner in which they wished Melbourne also to treat John Alexander Dowie.²⁸

Notwithstanding this opposition, the *Leaves of Healing* concluded, “hundreds were saved, healed, blessed, and brought out of the apostasies and baptized . . . as might be expected.”²⁹

²⁷“Visitation at Melbourne, Victoria, Australia,” *Leaves of Healing* (May 7, 1904): 57.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 60.

Dowie's meetings at Adelaide met with similar results—a hostile press, riotous crowds, but constructive meetings. As he continued his meetings in New Zealand, Ceylon, India, West Africa, and Europe, word of his New York and Australian adventures preceded him, bringing hundreds and sometimes thousands of the curious to his meetings. He did not encounter any disruptive behavior for the rest of his tour until he reached London, England. There, to his surprise, he received orders to leave the Hotel Cecil that had hosted him when he was in London four years before. Attempts to register at other hotels in the city were denied and he had to end up staying in the home of one of his church members. The contract for the Royal Albert Hall, which he had engaged for his meeting, was canceled by its officials. Word had come to them that, while in Australia, Dowie had denounced King Edward VII for immoral behavior. Angry mobs followed his every move. After a few private meetings with the faithful, Dowie left for Liverpool and “escaped” to Paris. There he awaited passage back to New York where he held a final meeting before returning to Zion City.³⁰

The press had a field day, declaring his world tour a total disaster. Dowie disagreed. While the press had been attacking him from 1900-1906, trying to drive him from Chicago, he had firmly established The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church. In 1899, when he conducted his war against Chicago's medical community, the press had again descended upon him in fury. While he had kept press attention on his nightly denunciations of the medical doctors, his agents were quietly buying up the farms that would become Zion City. Once again he had made himself the focus of attention with his “triumphal entry” upon the world stage. While the press was pronouncing his tour a failure, he was reading reports from Zion that the church had just passed 250,000 members.

Since the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church accepted only adults as members, Dowie figured over 500,000 were directly under the influence of Zion and that, through those relationships, another 500,000-1,000,000 were his potential next converts. Everything was proceeding according to plan. As he had said on another occasion, “What we have to do is to learn, even from what the devil is doing. The devil can teach you a lesson, if you will take it. I have had lots of lessons by getting a thump

³⁰“Visitation to London and New York and Return to Zion City,” *Leaves of Healing* (July 16, 1904): 389, 391, 393-35.

from the devil.” Now, he believed, he had learned to use the devil to beat the devil.³¹

John Alexander Dowie functioned on the fringe of the Holiness Movement. While one of the “come-outers,” he differed from Daniel S. Warner, for instance, who critiqued the denominational world and sought to step outside it without forming another “church.” Dowie exhibited the organizational skills of John Wesley by aggressively shaping new church institutions that, in his view, fulfilled better the intention of God in the short time remaining before the return of Christ.

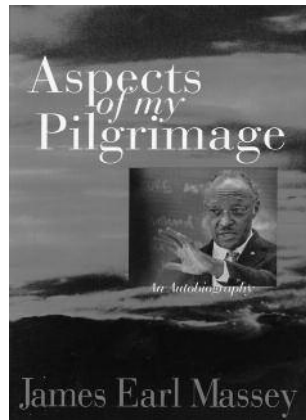
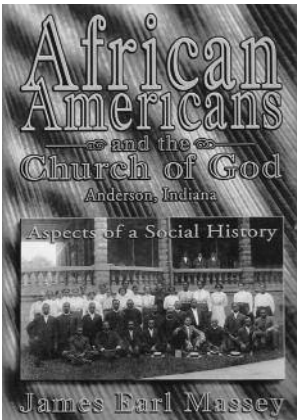
³¹“Opening of Zion’s Hall of Seventies,” (January 28, 1899): 255.

The 2006 Smith-Wynkoop Book Award

Presented to Dr. James Earl Massey
for the book

*African Americans and the Church of God
(Anderson, Indiana): Aspects of a Social History*
(Anderson University Press, 2005)

The Timothy Smith-Mildred Bangs Wynkoop Book Award is named for Wesleyan scholars who looked at issues from new angles of vision, demonstrated independent judgment, and provoked thought. This award recognizes a recently published work, based on original research, that reflects and promotes the purposes of the Wesleyan Theological Society. This year it is awarded to James Earl Massey for his 2005 book *African Americans and the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.): Aspects of a Social History*.



African American participation in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement is little known or understood. Historians have written extensively about the movement's camp meeting and revival culture, denominations, theological developments, and the role of women, but they have rarely glanced at the story of African American participation. James Earl Massey now has begun filling an important gap in the literature. He has participated in the Wesleyan/Holiness movement's life from a unique vantagepoint. His story is a 20th-century odyssey spanning the years of racial segregation, civil rights struggle, and today's ongoing but unfinished work of racial understanding in church and society. Two of his recent books concern the black experience within the holiness movement, and they move us toward integrating that experience into the stories of the wider holiness movement and American Christianity.

The first is his autobiography, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (Anderson University Press, 2002). Massey describes how his parents, natives of Alabama, were part of the 20th century migration of Southern blacks to the northern states. They met at a camp meeting—a *holiness* camp meeting—in Pennsylvania. They made their home in Detroit and raised their children in the Church of God (Anderson). He describes the positive influence that the great Methodist preacher Howard Thurman had on his approach to preaching and ministry; the founding of the Metropolitan Church of God in Detroit under his leadership; his role in preparing ministers at the Jamaica School of Theology in Kingston; his call to be campus minister at Anderson University in the aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, assassination; and then, from 1977 to 1982, the public voice of his denomination as the preacher on its aptly-named weekly radio broadcast, "The Christian Brotherhood Hour." There is more: Dean of the Chapel at Tuskegee University and Dean of Anderson University School of Theology. Massey tells a personal story, but it illuminates the black experience in a predominantly white denomination.

The book for which we now recognize Dr. Massey is a more recent publication, *African Americans and the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)*. Let me share the rationale for its selection.

First, there is a historiography of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement that follows rather well-worn paths. But Massey leaves that familiar terrain and strikes out into territory that has, at best, only been lightly charted in the past. Second, the story of African Americans in the Holiness tradition must be pursued largely, though not exclusively, through focused denominational studies, as Dr. Massey has done. Will his work

now inspire others to examine the story of African Americans in their denominations? One can certainly hope so.

Third, Massey tells the story of how the ethics of race evolved within the Church of God over the 20th century, and how this development influenced denominational structure. He shows how a social ideal of Christian unity that motivated Church of God founders was later blurred by the culture, including the growing influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, and the concern of certain white leaders to restrict black participation at the church's annual meeting in Anderson; how black leaders organized a separate association that meets in Pennsylvania; how blacks never separated from the Church of God movement, but function within it with a high degree of autonomy; and how the changing social and political climate of the Civil Rights era led to a reassessment of how blacks and whites should function together within the Church of God. While each denomination in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition has its own unique story of race relations, the dynamic that Massey describes in the Church of God has its analogies in the sister holiness denominations.

Fourth, Massey introduced a theme in his autobiography that reappears as a provocative thesis at the beginning of *African Americans and the Church of God*. He shows that the Church of God (Anderson) has always attracted a higher percent of black members than other holiness churches have done. He argues that a key reason for this lies in a basic tenet of Church of God theology: its emphasis on Christian unity. Christian unity was a fundamental theological point in the early history of the Church of God Reformation Movement. It lay at the very heart of Daniel S. Warner's (1842-1895) founding vision and is integrally woven into Church of God ecclesiology. Thus, even when the politics of race blurred the promise of a truly unified church, the social vision at the heart of the unity ideal was a wellspring from which African Americans drew hope and inspiration, and to which they could appeal for a renewal of vision. Massey's point is well worth considering; throughout its history, the percentage of black members in the Church of God (Anderson) has ranged from ten to upwards of eighteen percent—a significantly higher percentage of African American members than ever found in Free Methodist, Wesleyan Methodist, Nazarene, and other holiness denominations whose backgrounds and polity are rooted in Episcopal Methodism. And it is a provocative point that suggests that Wesleyan-Holiness scholars should engage the notion of the believers' church with greater seriousness and respect than they have demonstrated so far.

Outstanding Dissertation Award: 2006 **Presented to Mark H. Mann**

This award is given to the individual whose doctoral dissertation is deemed an outstanding scholarly contribution to a research area related to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. The dissertation must fit well the nature and purpose of this award, be granted by an accredited, degree-granting institution, and be deemed a substantive contribution to the author's particular field of study and to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition generally. The dissertation must have been completed and successfully defended less than four years prior to the annual meeting at which it may be honored.

The Wesleyan Theological Society's 2006 Outstanding Dissertation Award is presented to Mark H. Mann. Mann's dissertation, written as a Ph.D. student at Boston University, is titled, "Perfecting Grace: Holiness, Human Being, and the Sciences." "In recent decades," writes Mann in the dissertation's abstract, "the Wesleyan-holiness movement has experienced a crisis regarding the understanding of its distinctive doctrine and theological centerpiece: Christian holiness. This dissertation contends that this crisis is due in part to faulty anthropological assumptions. Traditional holiness theologies have presumed a problematic view of human life and experience. This dissertation constructs an interpretation of Christian holiness upon an anthropological foundation that utilizes scientific and traditional theological resources. It finds that the human person should be understood as a multidimensional unity, an individual center of relatedness, a structured dynamism, and embedded freedom. And holiness should be understood generally as a quality of free responsiveness to the gracious call of God."

Mark Mann currently serves as chaplain and part-time professor of religion at Colgate University. His dissertation has been accepted for publication by T & T Clark.

Pastor-Preacher-Scholar Awards: 2006
Presented to: Brian Postlewait, Jeren Rowell,
and William Wilberforce Watty

This award is given to individuals whose service is deemed an outstanding example of Wesleyan/Holiness ministry. Individuals whose ministry exemplifies in important ways the orienting concerns and practices of Wesleyan/Holiness tradition may be considered for this award. These concerns and practices may include excellence in pastoral leadership, preaching, counseling, ministry to the poor and disenfranchised, encouraging theological exploration, missions, social activism, Christian education, etc. In 2006 the Wesleyan Theological Society recognizes three individuals as recipients of the Pastor/Preacher/Scholar award.

1. Brian Postlewait. Greg Voiles has written a powerful letter nominating Brian for this award: “Brian Postlewait exemplifies well the criteria for a recipient of the WTS award. I can think of no other pastor with whom I am acquainted that better embodies the virtues of what it means to be a follower of Christ and “pastor/preacher/scholar” within the Wesleyan/Holiness stream of the Christian Tradition. I will speak particularly of Brian’s Christlike/Spirit-animated service in the areas of pastoral leadership, preaching, ministry to the poor and disenfranchised, encouraging theological exploration, and discipleship.”

“When Brian first came to Kansas City Trinity Church of the Nazarene, he was pastor of a multi-congregational church in which we had a thriving Spanish speaking congregation and an English speaking congregation made up of about eleven. As our English speaking congregation began to grow in number Brian had to mediate a spirit of reconciliation amidst cultural conflicts in where the vision of our English speaking congregation, which included the recovery of ancient practices, sometimes conflicted with the cultural identity of our Spanish speaking brothers and sisters. Although Brian was the instigator of this exploration, which lead the English speaking congregation to a eucharistically centered worship and spirituality, he consistently exhibited the virtues of humility, kindness, and hope which led the two congregations in reconciliation and forgiveness and the hope that we really could be a thriving multi-congregational church.”

“Two of the key practices Brian introduced into our life together were the recovery of table fellowship and Christian hospitality. The recovery of table fellowship has led us to a eucharistically-centered wor-

ship. Brian has made us aware of the fact that this theological exploration is our legitimate heritage as Wesleyans who have our rooting within the Anglo-catholic heritage of the Western church and the Eastern Fathers' influence upon Wesley. Brian's focus upon the practice of hospitality has led us to become a church where all are welcomed, including the poor and marginalized. This focus has led us to involvement with our neighborhood through ministries such as ESL, food pantry, a food cooperative, and the establishment of an intentional Christian community of single men committed to our church and neighborhood called Kingdom House."

Brian Postlewait is currently the spiritual and community support director of the Community of Hope in Washington, DC. Prior beginning his ministry at Community of Hope, Brian was lead pastor for five years at Trinity Church of the Nazarene in Kansas City, Kansas. He has also served in a leadership role with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

2. Jeren Rowell. Ed Robinson has written a moving nomination letter on Jeren Rowell's behalf. "I count it an honor to nominate my pastor, friend, and ministry colleague, Rev. Jeren Rowell for the WTS Pastor-Preacher-Scholar Award," writes Ed. "For the past fourteen years I have privileged to be his parishioner, to listen to his faithful biblical preaching, to benefit from his loving pastoral care and to participate in a community of faith where leadership and administration were spiritual activities of servanthood rather than exercises of power and authority. I was blessed to share in theological dialogue concerning the nature and mission of the church, theologies of worship and the practice of ministry as his clergy colleague. Most of all, I experienced the joy of his spiritual journey toward holiness as a fellow pilgrim."

"Nowhere is good theology practiced with more significance than through the intentional servant leadership of good pastoral theologian who assists a congregation in discovering their calling as the body of Christ and then leads that congregation with wisdom and integrity to fulfill that calling. The mission Jeren called us to is characterized by the biblical mandate of perfect love. This kind of congregation grew out of the intentional leadership of a committed pastor who consistently reminded us of our Wesleyan theological heritage with its strong commitment to Scripture, the radical optimism of divine grace, a pervasive and broad perspective of God's redeeming work in Christ, the serious call to discipleship that flows from the sanctified heart, the urging and empowerment of Spirit toward maturity in the faith and the global mission of the church to declare by

word and action the message of Scriptural holiness by being fully engaged in the world but not of it. Jeren has been careful to remind us often that some of the most popular Christian voices did not speak for all Christians on issues of theology, ethics, culture, and politics. While not imposing particular conclusions to difficult questions or issues, he reminded us that there were other lenses through which a Wesleyan congregation must perceive, consider, and discern truth and directions in our mission.”

“Even though Jeren’s influence has had its most direct and intense influence in the context of the local church, it was not limited to a single congregation. He has contributed to several publications and most recently released a book on pastoral theology entitled, *What’s a Pastor to Do?: The Good and Difficult Work of Ministry* (Beacon Hill Books, 2005). His writings as the editor of *The Communicator* for Nazarene Publishing House, a position he held for eight years, reflected a probing pastoral theologian. His columns were at various times comforting, celebrative, challenging, controversial, and catalytic. Since 2000, Jeren has served as co-editor of *Preacher’s Magazine*. He has helped direct this publication toward an exclusive emphasis on homiletics, with a particular concern for preaching in the Wesleyan tradition. The inclusion of classic Wesley sermons along with those from contemporary Wesleyan-Holiness preachers has provided helpful resources for a renaissance of biblically grounded, theologically informed, creatively crafted, and passionately preached sermons in many congregations.”

Jeren Rowell currently serves as superintendent for the Kansas City district of the Church of the Nazarene. He was senior pastor at the Shawnee Mission, Kansas Church of the Nazarene for fifteen years and pastored previously in Chicago, Illinois, Nampa, Idaho, and as an associate for one year at Shawnee Mission.

3. William Wilberforce Watty. The reverends Carl C. Campbell and Dr. Leslie R. James write the following nominating William Watty for the Pastor/Preacher/Scholar award. “Rev. Watty is a classic model of the Methodist clergy in the Caribbean. His early education and spiritual formation within the Methodist tradition were instrumental in defining his sense of calling and vocation. This eventually led to his call to the ministry, following which he received formal training for the Methodist ministry at the then Caenwood Theological College in Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies. Caenwood had the singular task of preparing an indigenous Methodist ministry in the Caribbean.”

“Rev. Watty entered Caenwood at a critical period in Caribbean and world history. This was the time when the question was whether West Indians, and Caribbean people, were ready for self-government. Rev. William Watty began his ministry in the midst of those exciting times. Hence, he is symbolic of the Caribbean journey into self-discovery and autonomy. His ministry, which spanned the length and breadth of the Caribbean, led him to become the president of the autonomous Methodist Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA). Along the way, Rev. Watty served Caribbean Methodism as circuit minister and superintendent, district chair and general superintendent.”

“As a pastor he had a profound understanding of the contexts in which he worked. Compassionate and empowering, he was always constrained to do his duty toward those he pastured. Constantly aware of the fact that the Caribbean minister sets the tone for the hopes and aspirations of his flock, he always extended an invitation to engage in personal, genuine, and effective dialogue. To him, the ingredients of an effective and enduring ministry included: deep concern about relationships, genuine collegiality, and Christian fellowship, and knowledge that Christ has many services to be done. He was the voice of the Caribbean theologians asking the questions, exploring the answers that mattered to a people who assumed their responsibility to transcend the history which tried to erase their ancestry, tradition, identity and sense of direction. As a preacher and theologian his place at the crossroads from colonialism to independence in the Caribbean will endure.”

“Rev. Watty’s pastoral praxis has transcended Caribbean venues. In addition to pursuing advanced theological studies in England, Rev. Watty served as a lecturer at the Sealey Oak Methodist Training College. He was an outstanding teacher president at The United Theological College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, the premier theological institution in the Caribbean. He recognized that theological education, preaching, pastoral practice, and ecclesiology have a sacramental function in fashioning the new Caribbean person. In fidelity to Jesus’ summons to his first disciples, “follow me and I will make you fishers of men,” Rev. Watty, with typical clarity, declared that “no one wishes to deny the necessity of food, jobs and houses; but with all these, people still come short of the realization of their true humanity until they are able to achieve dignity and come to terms with themselves, their neighbors, and their environment in a way which is not just viable, but authentic.”

BOOK REVIEWS

R. David Rightmire, *Sanctified Sanity: The Life and Teaching of Samuel Logan Brengle*. Alexandria, Virginia: The Salvation Army National Publications, 2003, 235 pp.

Reviewed by Roger J. Green, Professor and Chair of Biblical and Theological Studies, Gordon College.

Sanctified Sanity is a well researched and well written text by an author whose knowledge of Salvation Army history and theology is clearly established. Two previous works, *Sacraments and The Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations* and *Salvationist Samurai: Gunpei Yamamuro and the Rise of The Salvation Army in Japan*, are highly regarded books, and David Rightmire brings the same thorough research to the writing of this book. A history of The Salvation Army in the United States is impossible without an understanding of the seminal influence of Samuel Logan Brengle (1860-1936), especially in his teaching and preaching of the doctrine of holiness. And that influence spread throughout the Army world, as well as throughout other denominations that shared the same Wesleyan vision for the holiness of the believer.

The author places Brengle's teaching of holiness, principally the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification of the believer, within the historic context of Brengle's life and ministry. Although this book is not a fully developed biography of Brengle, there is sufficient biographical research to provide the reader with an understanding of and appreciation for Brengle. Part I focuses on some highpoints of Brengle's life, particularly in his relation to The Salvation Army, a relation that began with his attending Salvation Army meetings in Boston and hearing William Booth preach at Tremont Temple Baptist Church. Brengle eventually moved to London where he was trained as a Salvation Army officer, and his ministry continued in The Salvation Army until his death.

The second part of this work focuses on the holiness theology of Brengle, the author rightly acknowledging that Brengle did not provide a systematic theology of the doctrine of holiness. David Rightmire promises in his introduction to “provide an orderly account of his holiness theology” (p. xii). This is not easy task, but points to one of the major legacies of this book. Rightmire has taken the heart of Brengle’s preaching, teaching, and writing and done just that. He has accomplished well what he set out to do. The extensive notes and bibliography provide invaluable information for the reader wanting to pursue his or her understanding of Brengle and his interpretation of holiness.

There are several aspects of this work that are worth pointing out, but two come to mind. The first is that Brengle was thoroughly grounded in the Wesleyan understanding of holiness. The author writes that “entire sanctification as an instantaneous gift—given subsequent to justification, in response to consecration and faith—was Brengle’s experience and his consistent message. In line with both John and Charles Wesley, he believed that, although this divine gift is received in a moment in time, this only signifies the beginning of a lifelong growth in holiness” (p. 91). Brengle’s practical pastoral concern comes out in the book as the author writes about appropriating holiness, maintaining holiness, the fruits of holiness, and misconceptions about the doctrine. To the reader familiar with Wesley, these themes will be quite familiar.

A second aspect of this invaluable work is placing Brengle within the context of the American holiness tradition, especially with its overemphasis of Wesleyan perfectionism to the exclusion of Wesley’s emphasis on the growth within the believer. The question is this—how was Brengle shaped by that tradition or how did he refine that tradition, especially within the Army? While Rightmire contends that in England members of the Booth family as well as George Scott Railton, an important early Army leader in Britain, also emphasized the immediacy of the experience of entire sanctification, largely influenced by American holiness teachers such as Phoebe Palmer, Brengle’s Wesleyan emphasis became critical as the teaching of the doctrine matured in Army circles. Indeed, David Rightmire is on target in his well-stated assertion that Brengle “helped to center Army holiness theology in the tradition of Wesley, which maintained a balanced tension between active faith and patient waiting in the experience of entire sanctification” (p. 156). This is a critical point and answers well those who leave the impression that all American holiness

teaching strayed from Wesley and emphasized crisis to the neglect of growth. Brengle was able to keep the biblical balance, and thus maintain a Wesleyan theology of holiness. This, perhaps, is one of his greatest contributions to Salvation Army theology particularly and to transatlantic holiness theology generally.

Herein lies the value of this work. While many readers may have heard of Samuel Logan Brengle, they are perhaps unaware of the broader Salvation Army theology that he represented, and are likewise unaware of the contribution that the Army has made to the life of the church and to the holiness tradition. This book is invaluable for bringing to light both the work of this great holiness teacher and doing so in the context of the ministry of the Army to which Brengle was committed all of his life since he first heard of those Salvationists preaching on the streets of his beloved Boston.

Lodahl, Michael. *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*. Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 2003, 254 pp.

Reviewed by Krishana Oxenford Suckau, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, Massachusetts.

In *God of Nature and of Grace*, Michael Lodahl offers those of us in the Wesleyan tradition corrective lenses, through which we can “read the world” in a more authentically Wesleyan way. In contrast to the anthropocentrism that has plagued so much of the theological tradition, Lodahl explores Wesley’s comprehensive vision of God as “Creator, Sustainer, and Fulfillment of all things” (18). He does so in dialogue with the sciences, ecological ethics, and process theology. The end result is a renewed vision of a Wesleyan theology of nature.

The book is divided into three sections: *Making, Molding, and Mending*. Lodahl begins the first section with a creative exegesis of Psalm 104, drawing on it to make several proposals for a Wesleyan theology of nature. This Psalm demonstrates that the biblical writers shared a cosmology similar to that of most inhabitants of the Mediterranean area. Lodahl explains that we should understand their descriptions of nature for what they were—cosmologies—and not attempt to make them a permanent science. There are also marked similarities between Psalm 104 and an ancient Egyptian hymn to the sun. Lodahl argues that these similarities exemplify Wesley’s doctrine of “prevenient grace,” as they show that God is at work in all people. Psalm 104 is also important in that it celebrates the “community of life,” highlights God’s continual sustenance of creation, and points toward the eschatological renewal of all things.

The book looks closely at the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2. For Lodahl, Wesley’s particular contribution to how we read these creation stories is his “*hermeneutic grounded in love and a method attentive to experience*” (55). Wesley understood the world as created in love, with the purpose that “love might flourish.” Yet, “experience” was also an important part of Wesley’s method, which led him to bring the scientific assumptions of his time to bear on his interpretations of Scripture. It is, therefore, in keeping with the Wesleyan tradition that we do the same.

From the Genesis accounts of creation, Lodahl moves to an extensive discussion of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, examining what is at stake in affirming or denying this doctrine. He brings process theology

into the discussion, explaining how it gets around the problem of evil by affirming that God created out of “next to nothing” rather than *ex nihilo*. Yet, while Wesley’s understanding of God’s power was similar to the process position in some ways, Wesley ultimately believed that God could “deliver” creation if God so desired. Most Wesleyan theologies do affirm the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, as God’s power to deliver is grounded in God’s power as creator.

In his section on *Molding*, Lodahl first explores why the world should matter to Christians and then examines what particular contributions the Wesleyan tradition has to offer. One theme that is especially important in this regard is Wesley’s emphasis on God’s gracious and intimate presence in the universe. While God is intimately present to creation, God is also transcendent, particularly as God allows room for creaturely agency and calls the world beyond the present to its eschatological fulfillment.

Lodahl continues to explore the theme of God’s intimate presence to creation by noting that the Wesley brothers affirmed the goodness of the “old” creation because of the goodness of the Creator, who created in love. This Creator is also the Sustainer, who continually renews creation through *creative grace* (136, 140). Yet, the love in which the world is created and sustained must be understood through Christ and his love on the cross. It is this love that calls forth the “new creation.”

In order to understand the connection between the Wesleyan doctrines of sanctification and creation, Lodahl analyzes one of the Wesley brothers’ table prayers. In relation to this prayer, he explores themes such as idolatry and Christ’s role as the “new Adam” in renewing and restoring creation, which ultimately leads to the sanctification of all life.

In his section on *Mending*, Lodahl shifts his attention to developing a Wesleyan eschatological vision. He explains that Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification is very important in understanding his eschatology, since Wesley conceived of perfection as possible *in this life*. In contrast with more apocalyptic eschatologies, Wesley was optimistic about the possibilities that “love might flourish” in this life. Lodahl argues that, despite contemporary cosmological predictions of the earth’s demise, Wesley’s vision holds good, and should motivate us to participate in “mending” creation.

Lodahl continues this theme by highlighting four key doctrines that hold particular promise in developing a Wesleyan ethic of care for the

created world. He analyzes Wesley's ideas about *prevenient grace*, *God as holy love*, *entire sanctification*, and *the witness of the Spirit*, and makes a persuasive case for the significance of each in developing a Wesleyan environmental ethic. Wesley's sermon "The General Deliverance" also holds particular promise, as it espouses a holistic soteriology and calls for human responsibility in caring for creation.

Lodahl appropriately concludes *God of Nature and of Grace* with a discussion of how eschatology should be re-envisioned in light of current cosmologies and ecological sensibilities. Here again, he does so in dialogue with process theology, particularly by critically analyzing the eschatologies of Schubert Ogden and Marjorie Suchocki. While informed by process thought, Lodahl departs from it in his affirmation of a bodily sense of bodily resurrection. He draws on Wesley's sermon "The General Deliverance" in order to argue for the eschatological importance of bodily resurrection and the interconnected redemption and resurrection of the entire creation.

Through his discussion of the *Making, Molding, and Mending* of creation, Michael Lodahl brings to life a Wesleyan vision of nature that has often been overlooked because of anthropocentric understandings of creation and salvation. In developing this vision, he soundly interprets Scripture and persuasively demonstrates the theological promise that several Wesleyan doctrines hold with regard to a holistic understanding of creation. In doing so, he calls for no less than a Copernican revolution in any Wesleyan way of reading the world that puts humans alone at the center of God's creative and redemptive activity.

Yet, this is not simply Lodahl's vision. He carefully stands on the shoulders of the Wesley brothers in building it. While standing on their shoulders, he also engages new scientific understandings of the world and contemporary theological perspectives, incorporating them into this vision. He thus moves beyond the thought of the Wesley brothers in many ways—as any Wesleyan theology for today necessarily must.

In a time when the ecological crisis forces us to rethink our theology in terms of its implications for all of God's creation, Lodahl's book is a must read. While *God of Nature and of Grace* is not primarily about environmental ethics, his theological vision has profound practical implications. Lodahl has given us lenses to more accurately "read the world in a Wesleyan way." The question that remains is, now that we can see, how then shall we live?

Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds. *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006. 194 pp., \$22.00.

Reviewed by Jeffery Wittung, Ph.D. student, Drew University

In light of the increasing interest in the West concerning the idea of deification, this small volume of essays will come as a welcome addition to the discussion. Growing out of the research in *theosis* being done at Drew University, which hosted an international conference on the topic in 2004 and is producing a growing corpus of scholarly contributions on the subject, this volume features eleven essays that provide concise explorations into salient thinkers and movements in the history of the Christian understanding of *theosis*.

In the “Introduction,” volume editors Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov provide a helpful overview of deification. Focusing on the foundations of *theosis* in both Christian Scripture and ancient Christian writers, they suggest that *theosis* “refers to the transformation of believers into the likeness of God” (1). Of especial interest for the serious scholar is a section titled the “Terminology of Theosis,” which lists Greek and English conceptual equivalents of *theosis*. Each term is accompanied by brief commentary, and the terms are categorized by similarity.

Because this particular collection is arranged according to the chronology of church history, the first two essays explore the biblical foundations of *theosis*. While Stephen Finlan addresses the philosophical and religious background of the perennially important NT text of 2 Peter 1:4, Gregory Glazov offers a refreshingly novel approach to the study of deification in the OT. Instead of focusing on the usual OT prooftexts, Glazov investigates the covenantal and sapiential anthropologies of the OT as potential biblical origins of the Christian understanding of *theosis*. Interestingly, in the case of the Wisdom tradition, Glazov’s conclusions are strikingly similar to that of the patristic thinkers.

Because of the importance of the first seven centuries for the development of this idea, the volume editors have chosen to dedicate a majority of the book to this historical period. The six essays that deal with the ancient Christian writers (which include the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, and Maximus the Confessor) are singularly excellent and offer intriguing overviews that, taken together, provide a solid foundation from which to understand the later developments in deification theory.

Of particular interest here are the essays by Vladimir Kharlamov and Jeffrey Finch. In his two contributions, Kharlamov successfully attempts to fill a gap usually left by studies that begin with the fourth-century developments of *theosis* and thereby ignore the contributions of the Apostolic Fathers and the second-century Apologists. Kharlamov argues that, while the specific terminology of *theosis* is not found in the Apostolic Fathers, important aspects that contributed to the later formulations of this idea are. These aspects, however, are oriented toward praxis, emphasizing what should be done to effect deification. Similarly, when turning to the Apologists, Kharlamov concludes that only occasionally did the understanding of deification extend beyond the attainment of immortality and incorruptibility, although it never received explicit treatment as “an independent theological issue” (85).

The two essays by Jeffrey Finch explore the well-known formulation of *theosis* as it is found first in Irenaeus and later in Athanasius. In his first essay, Finch confronts the historical claims of neo-Palamism, which seems to hold sway over much of contemporary discussions of deification, by demonstrating that Irenaeus did not distinguish between the essence and the energies of God in his thought on creaturely union with the divine. Finch then turns his attention to Athanasius, offering a solid rebuttal of the twentieth-century critics of Athanasius (e.g., Harnack). In both essays, Finch not only offers a well-constructed overview of the understanding of *theosis* in the ancient writer, but also provides convincing arguments that serve to refute well-established, contemporary views.

Two essays on more contemporary thinkers (Soloviev in the East and Torrance in the West) serve to round out the volume. Especially intriguing is Myk Habets’ essay on *theosis* in Reformed thought. He focuses on the theology of T. F. Torrance, for which, he argues, a doctrine of *theosis* is central. Because of this, Habets believes that Torrance’s theology allows us to see how “a modern-day Reformed doctrine of *theosis* may be constructed” (152). By side-stepping the seemingly ubiquitous trap of confusing a doctrine with the concept of *theosis*, Habets presents a well-argued, well-researched contribution to the discussion of the interface between deification and Reformed theology.

While there is much here to be commended, the book is not without its faults. It is less historically balanced than one might hope in a book ambitiously subtitled *Deification in Christian Theology* (six of the eleven essays deal with patristic authors). Unfortunately, this imbalance results

in seminal thinkers and movements being left aside. For example, neither Gregory Palamas nor neo-Palamism is adequately introduced, despite the latter being vigorously critiqued in more than one of the essays. Further, the book suffers from an obvious need for careful editing, which leads to frequent editorial inconsistencies and occasional roughness in the overall flow of the work.

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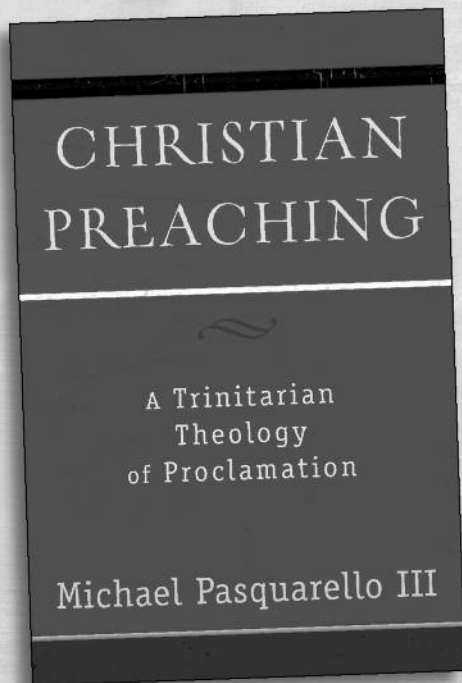
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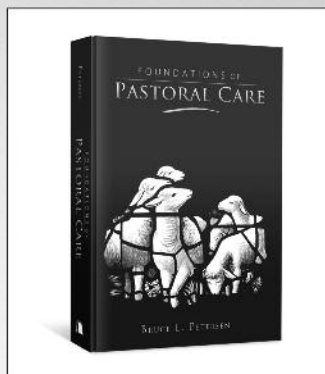
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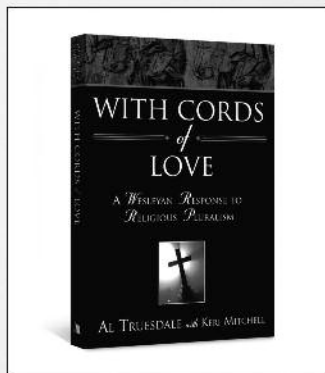


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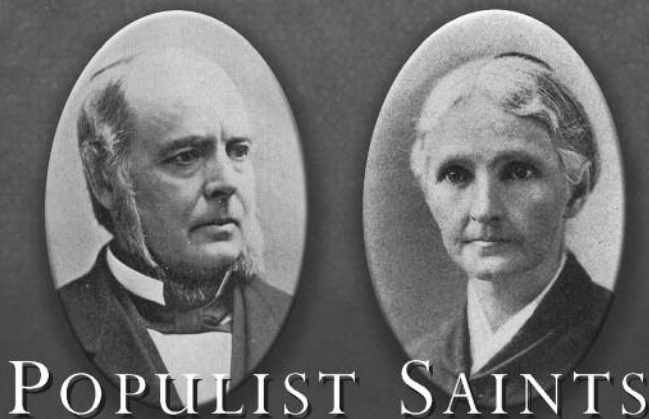
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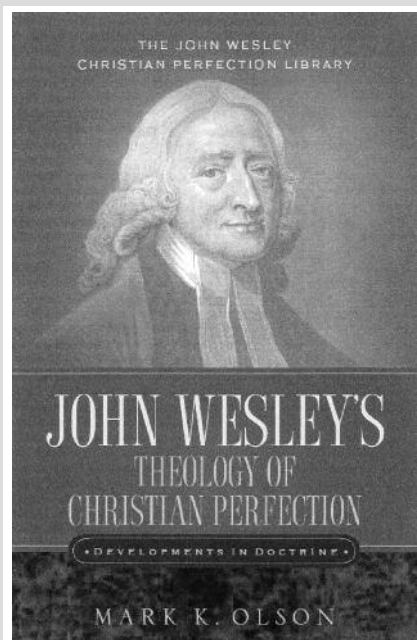
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