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IBTSCENTRE
AMSTERDAM

IBTSC will host a Conference on **'Conflicting Convictions'** on **Tuesday 3rd and Wednesday 4th of November** 2015 in Baptist House, Amsterdam. This conference will explore disagreements among Christians on 'matters that matter' and responses to such. We are looking for papers that will explore conflict among people who claim to hold to the same Christian 'tradition': its nature, causes, risks, opportunities and how such can be responded to and dealt with. Papers can be offered from a range of perspectives, biblical, theological, historical, and practical. There is the opportunity following conference review to be published in our Journal, *Baptistic Theologies*. We invite contributions not only from more experienced writers and scholars but also from aspiring and developing scholars. To offer or to discuss the possibility of submitting a paper, please contact Dr. Stuart Blythe, blythe@ibts.eu.

There is no charge to attend the conference although there will be a small fee to cover lunch provision and participants are responsible for their own travel, food, and accommodation. At present, there are no bursaries to help people come but if a participant would be willing to contribute towards another person being able to come please be in touch.

The Conference will follow the delivery of the IBTSC Nordenhaug lectures on Monday 2nd November 2015. These will be delivered by Dr. David P. Gushee – one of the leading moral voices in American Christianity. He is the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics, Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University, Atlanta & Macon, Georgia. Gushee is widely published author and editor of 20 books and hundreds of articles in his field, including *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, *Kingdom Ethics* (with Glen Stassen), *The Sacredness of Human Life*. He will deliver three lectures on ''What it means to say that human life is sacred'.

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Editorial

This issue of *Baptistic Theologies* has been published in Amsterdam under the auspice of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre. It marks a new beginning of our publication series. While the compositions of the Editorial Board and the International Consultant Editors are retained, the journal cover is different in appearance.

The essays of Tim Noble, Graham B. Walker, Jr., and Henrikas Žukauskas in this issue are papers read and discussed at the international conference on convictional theologies, celebrating the theological heritage of the late Prof. James Wm. McClendon Jr. It was hosted by the IBTS Centre on 04-06 November 2014 in Amsterdam. With these three articles we are concluding publishing the papers presented at the conference, a major part of which we have already collected in volume 6 of the *Baptistic Theologies*. Considering the focus of the conference, Noble examines the question of what happens when differing convictions about religious faith meet. He asks how the convictions of the person of other faith, when made known in a inter-religious mission encountered or otherwise, help the Christian believer to enter more deeply into their own faith in Christ. Starting with a critical assessment of McClendon's work on witness, he then looks at the story of William Carey – a celebrated Baptist missionary, and his encounter with the Hindu and Muslim 'other' in India as an example of how such a coming together of convictions played out in reality.

Walker examines the dynamic relationship between the memory of peoples and their community building effort. While stressing the importance of linkage between the past and the future, he also takes into consideration that there are always disruptive memories of those oppressed, which must be included in addressing authentic identity. He regards Elie Wiesel as an example of one who heaves the memory of the silenced to the forefront of Western identity formation today. The essay surveys next McClendon's theological insights favouring local contextual theologies and local communities in the construction of communities of conviction. In the last part of the essay Walker applies McClendon's approach to his analysis of the birth of indigenous Philippine theology and Independent (national catholic) Church, which he considers a link between the way of Christ and the rise of the once silenced and subdued peoples of the Philippines.

In his paper Žukauskas gives consideration to the most recent work *Seeing the World and Knowing God* of the contemporary Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes who looks at biblical wisdom as practical and also as wisdom that expresses God's own creativity. Žukauskas asserts that both aspects of the biblical wisdom narrative interrelate in a theology of creation. He reflects next on Yves Congar's work on tradition. For Congar – a Roman-Catholic

theologian, living tradition is human-divine reality, with the church as a subject and the Holy Spirit as the transcendent Subject. Žukauskas claims that some themes in both works overlap, but it is not immediately clear how they might be complementary related to one another. Congar's later work on the Holy Spirit (*I Believe in the Holy Spirit*) does reflect on human participation in the divine, but the role of the Holy Spirit in creation is under developed. Žukauskas explores how the theology of living tradition (developed by Congar) might absorb and profit from the creative participation of the creature in God's own creativity (as elaborated by Fiddes). By doing that he extends the trajectory of Congar's thought in affirming the place for human creativity.

The rest of the essays in this issue are contributions by Douglas Heidebrecht, Vladimir Kharlamov, James Gordon and Daniel R. Karistai to the theme of convictional theologising in post-modern contexts. Heidebrecht begins by examining how McClendon provides a theological and hermeneutical framework for the church's practice of communal discernment within a small 'b' baptist ecclesiology. Heidebrecht observes that McClendon's perspective is guided by his narrative theological approach, his understanding of the practices of Scripture reading-in-community, his articulation of the hermeneutic of a baptist vision, and the need for Christian witness to the cultures. Heidebrecht claims that McClendon's description of the practice of communal discernment revolves around two themes: the fellowship of the Spirit and the justification of convictions. The last part of the paper explores the implications of McClendon's approach to communal discernment for the ongoing journey of Canadian Mennonite Brethren as they seek to navigate cultural changes and the loss of theological consensus within their community regarding the issue of women in ministry leadership.

Kharlamov reflects on the recent revival of interest in the Christian understanding of *theosis* or deification. Baptist theologians, he notices, usually express marginal and cautious interest, predominantly addressing the use of the concept within the context of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. While insights from Patristic and modern Orthodox theology are indispensable for understanding deification, they should not limit the theological scope, which *theosis* can offer for a post-modern narrative of contemporary contextualisation. By examining a number of patristic sources, Kharlamov concludes that the creative fluidity of this concept in Patristic theology, along with its universal Christian perspective which transcends any denominational compartmentalisation, makes *theosis* an effective tool for engaging in original and constructive theological discussion that can enrich Baptist spirituality and theological reflections.

In his essay Gordon explores another key Christian concept – that of *kenosis* as a fruitful theological category. His argument assumes that if God is revealed in Jesus, and God is love, and God's love is Christ-like, then *kenosis* is a feature of the eternal communion of the Triune God. Using biblical and theological exegesis, and building on several contemporary life-stories, Gordon examines Trinitarian, ecclesial and pastoral implications discernible when such kenotic love is applied constructively to key areas of human, social and ecclesial experience. In this essay he illuminates such areas as welcome and hospitality, reconciliation and peace-making, pastoral care and presence, generosity and gift, community and disability.

Karistai, in the concluding essay of this collection, identifies some of the key shifts from modernity to post-modernity with special reference to the city and the church by examining the most important works of theologians Harvey Cox and Graham Ward. In the first part of his work he tracks the evolution of Harvey Cox's argument for secularisation as an instrument of positive cultural transformation over the past fifty years, since Cox's *The Secular City* has been originally published. In the second part of the paper Karistai examines two key concerns which Graham Ward spends a considerable amount of time working through – those of cultural change and the reading the signs of time. His reflections are not intended for arriving at fixed answers to these questions rather Karistai points to the vacuous nature of the post-modern condition. Using Cox's metaphor, he suggests that Ward's ideas can be an important starting point for the churches to find their home in the post-modern city.

Dr. Parush R. Parushev

Missionary Convictions and the Convictions of the Other

Tim Noble

Abstract: This article examines the question of what happens when the convictions about religious faith meet. It asks how the convictions of the person of other faith can help the Christian believer to enter more deeply into their own faith in Christ. Starting with James McClendon's work on witness, it then looks at the story of William Carey and his encounter with the Hindu and Muslim other in India as an example of how such a coming together of convictions played out in reality.

Key Words: James McClendon, William Carey, inter-religious encounter, mission,witness.

The theological tradition from which I come is a different one to that of James McClendon. However, in this paper, I want to acknowledge some of the contributions and limitations of McClendon, especially in terms of his theology of witness. I use the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* to examine the following question: what happens in mission when my convictions meet the convictions of the other to whom I am sent? In order to flesh out this engagement with McClendon, I will illustrate what I am saying by looking at another great, if not entirely unproblematic Baptist, the missionary William Carey.

My task in this paper can be stated simply. When we witness to our faith in Christ, we are not doing this in a vacuum, but to people who have their own beliefs, values, and convictions that witness also to us. So my question is, in what ways can this witness of the other help us in our own witness and in our own understanding of what it is to be disciples of Christ? Related to this is what for me has always been the fundamental problem with the language of convictions. Of course, lip service is paid to the injunction that McClendon and Smith make, that our convictions must be open to challenge and allow themselves to be confronted by others, but I wonder how often this has really been the case, and anyway whether it is either realistic or even desirable. I presume for most of us our fundamental beliefs in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Son of God are not really open to discussion, but are the bedrock on which all discussion takes place. I do not want to suggest that this is in itself necessarily a problem, but I do want to point out that a lot of our witness is likely to be in the form of irresistible

force (the gospel) hitting an immovable object (the convictions of the other), and if we are honest to ourselves, we might need to be honest to the other too. To put it very succinctly then, how can the witness of the other help us to understand and witness more fully, in order to hand on what we have received?

Witness

As I start this brief analysis of *Witness*,[1] a comment is due on what I understand as the order of McClendon's argument in the three volumes of *Systematic Theology*, namely that by living the Christian life we thus come to know what it is that we believe, and then we can witness to it. This is not an unreasonable claim. However, I am a missiologist, and whereas I would agree that all should end in mission, I would also want to suggest that all should also begin in mission, and that it is through the act of witness that we learn what it is to live a Christian life and what it is that we most truly believe. But, of course, this is a kind of hermeneutical spiral, and what we proclaim is not without its 'prejudices', in the Gadamerian sense,[2] the 'foreknowledge', if you like, that we bring, and so for the time being we can let McClendon rest in peace, and accept as reasonable, if not definitive, the order he gives.

A brief remark on method is also in place. It is not my intention to offer a critique of McClendon's theology, but rather to mine it for what it can offer for my argument. I hope that in doing so I will be just to McClendon, and in some ways I think that this way of using him is close to what he does with the writers he deals with. These are, as far as I can tell, judged in terms of their ability to illustrate what McClendon takes to be the main impulses of a baptistic theology. Of course, this means that at times he misunderstands or misjudges people,[3] but positively it means that he can read all sorts of figures from a new and enlightening position.[4]

Much of what shapes the content of the volumes of *Systematic Theology* stems from the fact that McClendon is trying to give voice to a neglected dimension in Christian theology, that of the Radical Reformation. This is a very necessary attempt, and I think on the whole a successful one, and one that he was both right to engage in and well-equipped to carry out. The drawback to this, though, is that, in order to make his point, he has to

[1] James Wm. McClendon, Jr. with Nancey Murphy, *Witness: Systematic Theology: Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).
[2] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.G.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960), pp. 255–275.
[3] I am not sure he understands many European theologians at all, and certainly he does not understand European Roman Catholic theology. But that was not his primary task.
[4] From *Witness* a good example of this is Chapter Six on Wittgenstein.

be too one-sided, too categorical, too dismissive of the other, except where that 'other' can somehow be shoehorned into being an honorary baptist, than which, obviously, there can be no greater honour!

As a final introductory comment, it should also be noted that McClendon is looking at witness in terms of a theology of culture, however broadly understood that term is (both by McClendon himself and in general).[5] The advantage of this is that it reminds us that all witness is encultured[6] and is witness to the encultured, and that there is no place (except, I think he might say, for the gospel) which is outside of culture. But the disadvantage is that this becomes yet another kind of reductionism—not that he reduces everything to culture, because he does not, but he may be open to the temptation of reducing all witness to something that happens within culture, which is then in a sense a completely empty phrase, much the same as the linguistic reduction, that is also a temptation. Is everything really 'language'? Is everything really 'culture'?

Cross-cultural Encounters

McClendon, of course, begins *Witness* with a reflection on the development of the idea of culture. I want to start with a question that McClendon raises in that first chapter: 'In particular', he says, 'Christian missionaries like others were troubled by the role of religion in (or as) a culture: Is religion an aspect of culture, or a mere synonym for culture, or is it something that (a la Matthew Arnold) somehow transcends a culture?'[7] What, in other words, is the relation between religious belief and culture? This, I think, is one of the things that William Carey would struggle with in India, as Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits and their opponents did in China.[8]

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[5] For an overview and bibliography on theologies of culture, see Ivana Noble, *Theological Interpretation of Culture in Post-Communist Context: Central and East European Search for Roots* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 9–10.

[6] I use 'encultured' rather than 'incultured', in order to emphasise the 'cultural blanket' that covers all. In that sense it is a kind of Kantian given, like space and time. We cannot imagine life outside of culture, though we do need to imagine and experience the reality of life outside of our own given culture.

[7] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 26.

[8] On Matteo Ricci, see R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). An interesting figure to note in this regard, whose story and approach mirrors that of Ricci in many ways is another Baptist missionary, Timothy Richard (1845–1919). Although in some aspects his approach was different to Carey, both were suspected by the Baptist Missionary Society (or at least parts of it) of spending too little time on matters of evangelism, and relations with the Society broke down in both cases, later to be re-established. Richard was a missionary in China who opted for the route of inculturation in a very similar way to that adopted by Matteo Ricci some three hundred years earlier. On Richard, see Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions 1846–1914* (London: Epworth, 1995), pp. 120–32, and on both Ricci and Richard, see Donald Treadgold, *The West in Russia and China: Religious*

McClendon, drawing on a literary scholar, Christopher Herbert, notes that 'the missionaries, in their struggle to combine objectivity with their missionary purposes, ran into a profound inner conflict'.[9] It is the nature of this inner conflict that interests me, and which I want to argue is crucial for any form of authentic mission. McClendon states his own purpose thus:

> The persistent underlying question is whether a people chosen as God's own is being converted as it seeks to convert others, whether there is mutual *metanoia* (repentance). For the congregation (or denomination, or world fellowship of churches) that ceases in its neglect of the New Testament's gospel to transmit the new in Christ, or ceases to be itself transformed by that newness, cannot truly be the community of word and worship, work and witness commissioned by the Risen One.[10]

The point I want to make is that this mutual *metanoia* is not a rather shallow 'spiritualised' action or virtue, but something that involves a deep commitment to and learning from the other, not just God as other, but the other human being.

I will pass over McClendon's engagement with Tillich, Hartt, and Yoder. Whether he is entirely fair to Tillich is, I would say, open to question, but the general point he wants to make, I think, is an important one. It is that, drawing on the strengths of the three authors, the church must both seek the good and name the evil in its surrounding culture, and do this by acting as the living presence of Christ to those around it.

To sum up so far, then: mission is the church's engagement with culture; culture itself is a complex but identifiable reality that contains both the *logoi spermatikoi* ('the seeds of the Word', as Justin Martyr put it)[11] and what is contrary to God; and witness should engage with both these aspects in fidelity to the Good News. Unlike McClendon, however, I want to maintain that there is a 'both—and' in terms of the church—it is one and it is many, and these two dimensions of unity and plurality need not be conflictual, and moreover, they are necessary.

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and Secular Thought in Modern Times Vol. 2. China 1582–1949 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); on Ricci and the Jesuits in China till 1774, pp. 1–34; and on Timothy Richard, pp. 56–65. A more critical view of the Jesuit (Riccian) position is to be found in J.S. Cummins, *A Question of Rites: Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993).

[9] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 27.

[10] Ibid., p. 36.

[11] See, for example, Justin Martyr, 2Apol 13.3, in *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras,* Ante-Nicene Christian Fathers II, (trans. Marcus Dods, George Reith and Rev. B.P. Pratten), (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), p. 83, and see also 2Apol 12.8, p. 278. See also Demetrios Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology* (Missoula, Mo.: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 133–134 and Denis Minns and Paul Parvis (eds. and trans.), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford Early Christian Texts) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). In this latter volume, the bilingual text of the thirteenth chapter of the Second Apology is on pp. 320–321; see also the editors' comments in their introduction, pp. 65–66.

On several occasions McClendon reminds us that the encounter between the proclaimer of the gospel (however much influenced by her or his own culture) and the culture of the addressee of the proclamation is not entirely one-sided. There is something to be learned from the other that will open up for us, as Christian witnesses, the fullness of the gospel that we have often hidden away. In a discussion of the contact between the Navajo and Christian missionaries—both the first Spanish Franciscans and later Anglophone Protestant missionaries—he remarks that 'the main theological question… asks what the gospel has to say both to the old that persists and to the new that has come'[12], and sees how some elements of the Navajo culture can, in a sense, lead Christians back to the gospel, whilst others will find themselves challenged by it.

Nevertheless, there are problems with this way of phrasing things that will re-emerge when I come to Carey. Although I would want to agree with his question, it is perhaps not so straightforward. For a start, whose gospel does the questioning? McClendon spends a lot of his time defending himself against potential charges of relativism, and I may need to do the same, but one of the major difficulties I have with the McClendonian position (and Yoder, especially, inasmuch as they coincide) is this very clear idea about who a 'New Testament' or 'gospel' Christian is, which really seems to be people like him. But as he is aware, there is no such thing—the New Testament, and I believe this is one of God's great gifts to us, is plural, and so there are many, perhaps conflicting, certainly contested, ways of being a New Testament Christian, some of which are radically different to McClendon's assumptions of what it involves.

The second point is, in a way, more insidious. McClendon writes:

> For the gospel of the new that comes in Jesus Christ can only exclaim with an amen to the Navajo sense of the wholeness of life and the beauty *(hózhó)* it evinces. Would that Europeans and Anglo Americans had perceived such a wholeness sooner and more clearly! Here Navajo 'religion' (or better, their religiousness) has much to teach the Christian missionaries and witnesses who come near it.[13]

Again, the sentiment expressed here is one that I would have a lot of sympathy with. But, I have to ask, what gives anyone other than the Navajo the right to decide what elements of their culture can challenge the gospel? If I decide what it is that I have to learn from you, I am guilty of what Emmanuel Levinas, the great French philosopher (whose name, surprisingly, I do not find in the indices or bibliographies of the volumes of

[12] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 73.
[13] Ibid., p. 73.

Systematic Theology), would call totality, the reduction of the other to the I.[14] But really the point is that I do not know what the other has to teach me. In McClendon's defence, we can say that this perhaps is merely infelicitous phrasing, but it may also betray a real danger.

Convictions: Complementary or Clashing?

The final passage in *Witness* that I want to attend to before moving on to William Carey comes about three-quarters of the way through the book, and directly addresses the question of the encounter of convictions and the possibility of their changing. McClendon phrases the problem like this: 'Human beings are both united and divided by the convictions they share—united, for convictions form strong bonds that unite those who share them; divided, for not all have the same convictions, and the divisions go to the very heart of communal self-understanding'.[15]

This is, I suppose, true as far as it goes, and certainly the first part is relatively defensible (only relatively, since of course it depends to some extent on what is meant by sharing convictions—how closely, how many, for how long, in what circumstances?). The second part is, I think, more questionable, at least as a normative statement, even if clearly (and McClendon names many of the usual suspects) there is a lot of descriptive evidence for it. But why can the fact that you have different convictions than I do not be a strong uniting bond, as I realise my need of you to challenge me, to help me question and perhaps strengthen my convictions, to complement what I believe?

Now, to be fair to McClendon, his main point in this section is precisely to argue for the possibility of inter-convictional discourse, that however different we may be, there is enough that we have in common to enable us to begin some kind of conversation that is at some level mutually intelligible (this is not, clearly, as banal as having a lingua franca, though that helps). Secondly, there are what he calls 'loci of value', ideas/concepts/ relationships around which value judgements are made. These may vary immensely in content and in most other ways, but they are sufficiently robust to enable some initial contact to be made. And thirdly, there is the narrative social setting within which encounters happen, and which is open to change, and out of which a new social matrix can arise. This will not of course lead automatically to 'convictional transformation', but it at least provides a base on which it can happen.

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[14] See most famously for this, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (trans. Alphonso Lingis) (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, n.d.), (original French, 1961).
[15] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 296.

I think that this is all important and helpful and true. If convictions never change—any of them—then a person is either dead or might as well be. But even the examples that McClendon uses in these pages of his book give rise in me to a certain disquiet—he speaks of pagan North Africans becoming Muslim, Buddhist Koreans becoming Christians, Christians being reformed. All, no doubt, good things. But what about Muslims becoming pagans, Korean Christians becoming Buddhists, Christians who have recognised the need for reformation also recognising where they have thrown out the baby with the bathwater? Are these too not possible, and should they not be equally welcome? Perhaps not, but they should be acknowledged as legitimate possible outcomes of an encounter.

So, what can we take from this perfunctory race through the pages of McClendon's *Witness*? First, I have to acknowledge that it cannot even pretend to do justice to the richness and depth of McClendon's argument. Even if I do not always (or even perhaps often) agree with him, the work is thought-provoking and exciting. More specifically, for my argument, though, I take from him the importance of engaging with culture: it may be complicated and complex, but, in keeping with McClendon's more general emphasis on the importance of community, we can see that human beings are encultured, each individual always part of a variety of larger groups with their own patterns of relationship, and that it is within these contexts that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are both proclaimed and encountered, and, indeed, that the words which tell of the Word are read.

There is also an awareness that, like any meeting, this encounter cannot be purely one-sided, that to understand a culture is to understand the gospel, if not anew, then more fully. This is, it seems to me, a key point, though I do not think that McClendon himself was able to take it far enough—there is too much of an element of wanting to decide what the other can give, rather than allowing oneself to be surprised. But the starting point is there, as is the fundamental belief (conviction, one might reasonably say) that cross-convictional communication is possible without necessarily having recourse to violence and denial of the other.

Having said all this, there remains what seems to me the critical weakness of the appeal to convictions. I fully understand and to some extent accept the definition of convictions that makes them a fundamental part of who we are as people, such as that to change them would be to change who we are. But, as is often the case, the devil is in the detail. McClendon himself is well aware of the need to let our convictions be open to challenge, but of course that is itself a conviction, part of the set of

underlying beliefs or principles that made him who he was, and it is, moreover, one that I share.

However, we all know that there are people—perhaps a majority, definitely a large minority, and certainly, in Christian circles, a vociferous minority—who would say that their convictions about Christ are in no way open to challenge or change. In a cultural exchange, we, as Christians have the truth in its fullness because we have Christ, and there is nothing else to be said, except to faithfully proclaim the word, in season and out. Such people (and there is undoubtedly a part of me that would have a great deal of sympathy with this position, so I do not speak here in terms of 'them' and 'us') would be very much like the 'martyrs', the sixteenth and seventeenth century Anabaptists whom McClendon applauds, who would rather give up their lives than give up their conviction that their form of Christianity is the right (maybe even the only right) one. But I come from a tradition—of English Roman Catholicism—that makes the same, I would say deeply misguided and dangerous appeal, to its sixteenth and seventeenth century martyrs as a justification for its convictions. So where do we get to?

William Carey and the Encounter of Convictions of Witness

I am not sure that I am necessarily criticising McClendon here, but pointing to what often actually happens when convictions clash. And to make this clearer still, I want now to turn to William Carey (1761–1834). In narrative terms, Carey's story can be told in several different ways. There is the hagiographical version of the heroic missionary who more or less singlehandedly convinced at least a whole denomination, if not a wider church, of the need to engage in mission, who left everything behind to go to India where he laboured selflessly and tirelessly in the service of the gospel, eventually making converts, learning languages, translating the Bible, or parts of it, into many of them, and establishing a Baptist and evangelical Christian educational presence in India that continues to flourish till today. Or there is a perhaps equally hagiographical story of failure—the cobbler who was so useless at his trade they were glad to send him to India, a man who failed his wife and children, whose evangelising skills were so limited that he scarcely made any converts himself, whose language skills were such that most of his Bible translations were riddled with mistakes, whose intransigence meant that he broke with his supporters back home.[16] And, of course, there is the story that combines both, that

[16] The literature on Carey is extensive. Biographies include two that were written by his descendants, the first by his nephew Eustace in 1836, and the second by his great-great grandson, S. Pearce Carey, *William*

recognises that Carey may be a saint, but that saints are human, and therefore also sinners.

It will come as no surprise that the third version is the story I want to concentrate on. Even a cursory reading of Carey's great missionary tract, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, in which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings Are Considered*[17] (we might add to his failings a weakness when it came to choosing snappy titles) makes clear his convictions about the necessity of preaching the gospel to those who had not yet heard it. It is to his great credit that Carey did not do this out of imperial convictions, as part of what has been called '*mission civilizatrice*'[18]—he was a firm abolitionist to the extent that he suggests that the money saved on sugar through a trade boycott of West Indian sugar, produced using slaves, could be given to the mission organisation he proposed. But he did do it out of the conviction that the word of God needed to be proclaimed to the 'heathens and pagans'.

In theory, in *An Enquiry*, Carey was open to what McClendon would call the communication of convictions. Carey writes:

> Barbarous as these poor heathens are, they appear to be as capable of knowledge as we are; and in many places, at least, have discovered uncommon genius and tractableness; and I greatly question whether most of the barbarities practised by them, have not originated in some real or supposed affront, and are therefore, more properly, acts of self-defence, than proofs of inhuman and blood-thirsty dispositions.[19]

In other words, he really does not enter into the encounter with a sense of what we might call imperial superiority, though he does enter into it with a

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Carey D.D., Fellow of Linnaean Society (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923). A third was written by the son of Carey's fellow Serampore missionaries, Joshua and Hannah Marshman, John Clark Marshman, *The Story of Carey, Marshman and Ward, the Serampore Missionaries* (London: J. Heaton and Son, 1864). A more recent biography is Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham, Ala.: New Hope, 1991). The title of this book is obviously of interest (and indeed so is the book itself) in relation to the title of McClendon's volume.

[17] It was first published in Leicester by a woman publisher, Ann Ireland. Various facsimile editions exist, and it is also reprinted as an appendix in George, *Faithful Witness*. A facsimile is also available online at http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf, according to which I quote in what follows. For rather obvious reasons, I will not use the full title, and will refer to the pamphlet as *An Enquiry*.

[18] On the idea of the '*mission civilizatrice*', see Robin Butlin, *Geographies of Empire: European Empires and Colonies* c.*1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 350–395, which includes his most specific treatment of foreign missions. See also Werner Ustorf, 'Global Topographies: The Spiritual, the Social and the Geographical in the Missionary Movement from the West', *Social Policy and Administration* 32:5 (1998), pp. 591–604, here pp. 595–597, and Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm.Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 254–260.

[19] Carey, *An Enquiry*, pp. 63–64.

clear sense of religious superiority, both of his own particular brand of Christianity (even though, like McClendon, he is aware that not all his co-believers are without fault), and of the gospel in general. The addressees of mission are to be treated well, and with respect, and this is an important and valuable contribution, but in a sense it is also more strategic than anything else, a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Reading Carey's letters and journals reinforces this picture. Of course, we have to get behind the language of a late eighteenth-century Englishman and avoid getting too deeply offended by the particular terms he uses, ones that, by and large, and thankfully, we have learned to dispense with. In this sense, Carey is a product of his time and culture.

However, the largely ineffective[20] nature of the proclamation of the gospel by Carey may not be simply due to the Indians among whom he worked being so steeped in sin and so tied by the caste system that they were incapable of accepting the good news, which most of the time is what he thought. Certainly the latter played a role, and in fact several among the first converts came from a kind of spiritualised Hindu group, the *bhakhti* movement, which had begun as a kind of Hindu spiritual revival in the eleventh or twelfth centuries,[21] and that preached a more egalitarian form of religion that sought to do away with the caste system.[22]

Moreover, Carey did see some good in the Hindu writings and in the Qur'an. However, ultimately he would insist that they were like good bread that contained 'a very little malignant Poison, which made the whole so poisonous that whoever should eat of it would die', and that 'their Writings contained much good instruction mixed with deadly poison'.[23] This poison he saw in many of the celebrations and festivities of the local people, both Hindu and Muslim, which he generally viewed as forms of idolatry.

As far as I can tell, there is nothing in Carey that suggests that he ever really thought there was anything to be learned from Hinduism or Islam, something that would affect his Christian convictions, and help him

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[20] I am not entirely sure that this is the right language. Effectivity cannot be measured in terms of numbers of converts. But if that was his aim—which I think it was—then for the most part he was not very successful for a quite a long time.

[21] Thus, his first convert, Krishna Pal, had belonged to this movement. See George Smith, *The Life of William Carey, D.D.: Shoemaker and Missionary* (London: John Murray, 1885), p. 133. On the *bhakti* movements, see Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987) and Karel Werner (ed.), *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism* (Durham Indological Series 3) (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993).

[22] For more on this see also Eleanor Jackson, 'From Krishna Pal to Lal Behari Dey: Indian Builders of the Church in India or Native Agency in Bengal 1800-1880', in Dana Robert (ed.), *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Reality in Mission History 1706–1914* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 166–205.

[23] Terry Carter (ed.), *The Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey* (Macon, Ga.: Smith and Helwys Publishing, 2000), pp. 3–59 (hereafter Carey, *Journal*, with date of entry and page number in Carter's edition): Carey, *Journal*, 9th May 1795, p. 58.

to a greater understanding of the gospel. For this is what is at stake—it is not assuming that somehow we would need to abandon our beliefs, or let go of what is most precious to us, but that through what the other teaches us, our convictions can be strengthened and changed, by enabling us to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of God. If not, our convictions will become an ideology, and the God we worship will be not the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but a god we have created, the god of our convictions.

It is perhaps not surprising that the incident where Carey comes closest to recognising the possibility of learning from the goodness of the other, if not from their religious convictions, came at a moment of personal tragedy, when the learned convictions, even the learned convictions of the heart, are replaced by something even more instinctual and fundamental. In his first year in India, Carey was constantly on the move, so that the already strong susceptibility to illnesses such as malaria and dysentery was increased. In October 1794 he was struck down with dysentery, as was his son, Peter. Carey himself came close to death, but pulled through, but the five-year-old Peter succumbed to the disease, probably the final straw that pushed his wife, Dorothy, over the edge into incurable mental illness.[24] Carey was still weak from illness, and sought help to dig a grave to bury the boy. These are his words:

> I could induce no person to make a coffin, though two carpenters are constantly employed by us at the works. Four Musselmans, to keep each other in countenance, dug a grave; but, though we had between two and three hundred laborers employed, no man would carry him to the grave. We sent seven or eight miles to get a person to do that office; and I concluded that I and my wife would do it ourselves, when at last a servant, kept for the purpose of cleaning, and a boy who had lost caste, were prevailed upon to carry the corpse, and secure the grave from the jackals.... On account of the four men above mentioned digging a grave for my poor child, the Mundal, that is, the principal person in the village, who rents immediately under the Rajah, and lets lands and houses to the other people in the place, forbad every person in the village to eat, drink, or smoke tobacco with them and their families, so that they were supposed to have lost caste. The poor men came to me full of distress, and told their story.[25]

Carey immediately went to the village and remonstrated with the *Mundal*, forcing him to accept the men back into the community. He did

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[24] On the tragic story of Dorothy Carey, see James Beck, 'Dorothy's Devastating Delusions', *Christian History* 11:4 (1992), pp. 30–31 and in more detail, James Beck, *Dorothy Carey: The Tragic and Untold Story of Mrs. William Carey* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992).

[25] See his journal entry of October 1794, in Carter (ed.), *Journal and Letters of William Carey*, and also Galen K. Johnson, 'William Carey's Muslim Encounters in India', *Baptist History and Heritage* 39:2 (2004), pp. 100–108, here pp. 104–105.

not, this time, preach to them, or try to convert anyone, but acted out of a sense of justice and gratitude for the other who had come to him in his hour of need. Carey does not put it this way, but my sense reading this passage is that he recognised in the action of the four men people who were fulfilling the gospel imperative of Matthew 25, giving succour to the needy. It is those, not the ones who make a lot of noise about their supposed belief (cf. Mt 7:21–23), who will be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Carey never lost his deepest convictions about his faith, and frequently he was dismissive of the other. And yet, as time went on, even if he continued to denounce the evils of the culture he saw around him, he came to recognise also its values and riches. I think he could never quite engage in a conversation with this culture on the level of convictions, and that remained his weakness and perhaps that of Christianity in India in general. To learn from the other is not to abandon what one believes, but to allow it to be strengthened and deepened, so that, eventually, one's witness can become clearer and more faithful to the one to whom we witness, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

In conclusion, I will turn to my own Christian tradition. Having written the main body of this text, I went away for a few days' retreat, praying with the help of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. One of these exercises is a reflection on God's unstinting love for me, expressed in all that he does for me, which, Ignatius hopes, will lead to a complete surrender of self to God. At the start of this exercise, he makes the following remarks: 'Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words… love consists in a mutual sharing of goods, for example, the lover shares with the beloved what he possesses, of something of that which he has or is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover'. Mission in love, mission with love, mission as the meeting between lover and beloved—this is the mission of God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son to that world, and this is our mission, carried out in the mutuality of love, learning and proclaiming, proclaiming and learning.

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Anamnesis and *Anastasis*: A Global Reflection in the Way of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.

Graham B. Walker, Jr.

Abstract: This essay examines the dynamic relationship between the memory of peoples and their community building futures. While stressing the importance of linkage between the past and the future, there are always disruptive memories of those oppressed that must be included to address authentic identity. This essay identifies Elie Wiesel as an example of one who wrenches the memory of the silenced to the forefront of Western identity formation today. The essay then turns to incorporate the strategic theological agenda of James Wm. McClendon, Jr. as one who privileges local theologies and local communities in the construction of more inclusive communities of conviction. McClendon's strategic theology is then extended globally to the Philippines revealing the birth of the Philippine Independent Church as the nexus between the way of Christ and the rise of the once silenced peoples of the Philippines.

Key words: Gregorio Aglipay, convictional communities, Filipino, local theologies, memory, Isabelo de los Reyes, José P. Rizal, Elie Wiesel

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger… . In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist.
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> Walter Benjamin[1]

In the Fall of 1998 I was privileged to attend the Andrew W. Mellon Lecture Series at Boston University. This is the annual lecture series given by Elie Wiesel, Jewish Holocaust survivor. The invitation was given by Wiesel himself in response to a book I wrote identifying various theological challenges presented by his writing. The morning of the first lecture I was given the opportunity to interview Wiesel. As usual, one meets such moments with a sense of awe and stupor in one's life. Yet I managed to articulate a few questions about which I sought clarification concerning his writing. One event, however, I did not anticipate was the correction I received when I referred to *Night* as a novel. Almost in mid-sentence, Elie Wiesel corrected my categorical error and referred to *Night* as

[1] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, intro. and ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. from German Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 255.

autobiographical history. I am sure we discussed other matters that morning, but that simple correction has haunted my perception of his self-identification as a writer for years. Where does Wiesel's writing stand on the line that runs between history and story? What is its role between the two? Is there a way these two modes of narration converge with respect to what we know today historically as the Holocaust?

In large measure, this essay proposes a response to the ethical question of how we hear and write history. First examining how Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel intends to use his unique storytelling ability to disrupt all encompassing meta-narratives through *'anamnesis'*—memory—the essay then shifts in search of a Baptist way of traditioning that might similarly confront the repressive character of totalised history and recognise the diversity of the past and the open-ended nature of the future to explore new modes of Christian community. As James Wm. McClendon describes this it is '*anastasis*'—a new way forward for constructing the world. Finally, in McClendon fashion, the essay retrieves two important biographies as models. These two nineteenth century Filipino revolutionaries, José P. Rizal and Isabelo de los Reyes, serve as an extension of McClendon's insightful use of models in a region where the Christian testimony is emerging in a congregational, rice field-like movement of the peoples of the Pacific Rim. Both of these revolutionaries provide tactical and strategic examples for negotiating the hybridity of historiography that gave birth to a truly indigenous Christian expression with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente.

When it comes to Elie Wiesel's autobiographical history, *Night*, the issue of categorisation was not mine alone. Daniel R. Schwarz writes:

> I am interested not in indicting Wiesel for transforming his nominalistic memoir into novelistic form, but in how, in response to publishing circumstances and perhaps his own transformation, he reconfigured an existential novel about the descent into moral night into a somewhat affirmative reemergence to life.[2]

Naomi Seidman has traced the significant changes in the text that was to become *Night.* The Yiddish text was submitted in 1954, yet in 1956 it appeared as volume 117 of a series on Polish Jews entitled *Dos polyishe yidntum* (Polish Jewry). Wiesel's Yiddish title is better known as *Un Di Velt Hot Geshvign* (And the world has remained silent). Seidman notes that the massive Yiddish documentary testimony was edited in the translation process to the French *La Nuit* (1958) with the effect of positioning the

[2] Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining The Holocaust* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p. 50.

memoir within a different literary genre. She writes, 'Wiesel and his French publishing house fashioned something closer to mythopoetic narrative'.[3]

It is precisely what Seidman calls the 'mythopoetic narrative' that I believe provides the crucial interface between history and life story for Wiesel. The paradigm for this convergence may be found in Aristotle's discussion of the linkage between *mythos* and *mimesis* in *Poetics*. Nelson Goodman describes this as the convergence of the two narrative poles by identifying the role of fiction as a reorganising of the world in terms of works and the works in terms of the world.[4] The novel, for Wiesel, redescribes what conventional history has already attempted to describe, only from within. It is a reconfiguration of the same or similar events, but from the perspective of the survivor. Wiesel's need to 'redescribe the world' may help to explain the 'reconfiguration' that Schwarz notes in *Night*. Wiesel's 'somewhat affirmative reemergence to life' as noted by Schwarz is not so much a reconfiguration as a transfiguration with the intent of drawing together *mythos* and *mimesis* in human action so the voices of the past are not lost and so the children of the future will never again experience such an event as the Holocaust.

In Solidarity with the Voice of the Dead

In his novel, *The Fifth Son,* Wiesel establishes the analogy of anamnestic solidarity, or solidarity in memory with the dead and the conquered, as the most effective analogy of history. Memory is no longer the case of nostalgia for some sort of paradise, because paradise has been transformed into the abyss of *Night.* Memory now becomes a source of questioning. In this sense, memory of the dead is always in the form of the interrogative for the present and the future. The memories of the dead are dangerous and unpredictable visitations from the past.

These are memories which must be taken into account because of their proleptic content: they foreshadow a potential movement in our history. Wiesel begins his protest against the order of death by the subversive power of remembering the particularity of suffering.

Wiesel chooses stories as the vehicle for the memory of suffering. This vehicle is less argumentative in form than the formal systems of theologians—less akin to social description and more connected with life histories. Ted Estess suggests that Wiesel's perspective affirms a narrative

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[3] Naomi Seidman, 'Elie Wiesel and the Scandal Rage', *Jewish Social Studies:History, Culture and Society* 3:1 (Fall 1996), p. 5.

[4] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 241.

quality to human existence. But despite Wiesel's strong attachment to a narrative world view, he tells stories for a particular purpose. He writes:

> In days of old, a young Jew decided to go forth to see the world. His mother, a poor woman in ancient Palestine, had no parting gift except a pillow. 'Take it my son', she said. 'If you come to a strange city and find no bed at night, you can always go out to the fields and sleep on this pillow'. So it came to pass: the young man arrived in Rome, and when evening fell, he went outside the city and cushioned his head on his mother's pillow. That very night the Temple in Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. And the pillow under the boy's head burst into flames. 'I only write when the pillow burns', explains Wiesel.[5]

Wiesel resists the idea of history that screens out the importance of particular suffering for the sake of continuity and meaningfulness. History is often defined by those who prevail, the history of success and the established. The conquered are remembered as the examples of what will not endure, while the victims and survivors are forgotten or suppressed by history. A principle of selection prevails in history that creates the unacceptability of victims and survivors—a principle that flaws history by legitimating history's forgetfulness. The memory of particular life stories of the suffering retrieves the vanquished and destroyed from the boundaries of history. The memory of suffering is a belief structure for the future that actively responds to human suffering. Helmut Peukert shapes this genealogical approach to traditioning with the following question:

> How can one retain the memory of the conclusive, irretrievable loss of the victims of the historical process, to whom one owes one's entire happiness, and still be happy, still find one's identity? If for the sake of one's own happiness and one's own identity this memory is banished from consciousness, is this not tantamount to the betrayal of the very solidarity by which alone one is able to discover oneself?[6]

The reinvestment of the world with meaning begins with the story of the suffering: the dead, those already forgotten, have a meaning that is still unrealised. The potential meaning of history depends on the voice of these voiceless. Wiesel writes:

> When man, in his grief, falls silent, Goethe says, then God gives him the strength to sing of his sorrows. From that moment on, he may no longer choose not to sing, whether his song is heard or not. What matters is to struggle against silence with words, or through another form of silence. What matters is to gather a smile here and there, a word here and there, and thus justify the faith placed in you, a long time ago, by so many victims.

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[5] Elie Wiesel, *Jewish Heritage* 7 (Spring 1966), p. 27.

[6] Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, James Bohman, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 208.

> Why I write? *To wrench those victims from oblivion. To help the dead vanquish death.*[7]

The memory of the suffering in the Holocaust brings a new moral imagination into political life; this memory brings a new vision of the suffering of others, which should mature into partisanship on behalf of the weak and dead.

What we learn from Elie Wiesel is that all historical occurrences are hybrid to some extent; the life story of the Survivor, the protagonist of Wiesel's historical novels, uncovers the dimensions of this hybridity. In so doing, these life stories subvert the pretensions of historical singularity at work in the narratives of a singular community or truth moving through time. If these life stories narrate the historical disjuncture and originally discontinuous episodes of time, these individual genealogies also narrate the coming together of unlikely, yet actual, historical junctures where blending and mixing have occurred. These life stories not only narrate the ruptures and fractures of the historical experience, they locate the connections which potentially heal these fractures.

A Baptist Perspective

Much Baptist theology has been folk theology rather than academic theology. By folk theology is meant the theology that a community of Christian people, in this case Baptist people, hold and by which they live. By academic theology is meant the theology that is held by persons whose social place in an intellectual elite is at least as important to their work as their place within a faith community, if indeed they have such a place. In general, folk theology is highly internalised but not necessarily articulated, and academic theology is highly articulated but not necessarily internalised.

Even before the ascendancy of methodologically critical thinking, however, academic theology differed from folk theology in various ways. For example, attention to method is routine in academic theology but rare in folk theology. The language of folk theology tends to be first-order language similar to the language of prayer, worship, witness, and exhortation, while the language of academic theology is usually second-order language, language in which the first order language is scrutinised.

Most Baptist theology has been folk theology, and most of the story of Baptist theology is a story of understandings of God and of God's relations to the world that is expressed in first-order language with a minimal interest in method and system. It is the language of confessions and sermons, and its

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[7] Elie Wiesel, "Why I Write?"*Confronting the Holocaust*, eds. Alvin H. Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 205-206, (emphasis added).

books are written mostly by pastors. Apparently there were no Baptist theologians whose principal work was done in an institution of higher education until the nineteenth century; in America, it seems that John L. Dagg was the first Baptist theologian who spent most of his working life in universities.

James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Baptist ethicist and theologian, understood the role of folk theology in Baptist community.[8] He illustrates with a story. When the great systematic theologian Origen (185-254) received Gregory and his brother as young students he first made friends with these young men. Origen taught the two brothers as a mentor more than the theory about the moral life; he taught them the practice of Christianity. Gregory, writing in his *Panegyric* eulogises his former mentor remarking that he 'stimulated us by the deeds he did more than by the doctrines he taught' (Pan. ix). Origen taught his students in the ways of Christian virtue with a goal to form their lives in the stories from Scripture and the image of Christ.[9] McClendon does not argue for the logical priority of ethics over doctrine, nor does he argue for the reduction of doctrine to ethics. Pedagogically, however, ethics is the beginning of character formation in the image of Christ.[10]

Early in McClendon's career narrative ethics, with its deep regard for character formation, had to be defended in the larger philosophical arena against the generally held assumption that ethics was a science of decision-making strategies. McClendon faced the Enlightenment legacy. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), generally credited with establishing utilitarianism, noted that the rightness of a decision can be determined by a formulaic principle: the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Bentham was eager to bring scientific accuracy to the study of morality. In similar fashion, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) further refined utilitarianism by focusing on particular issues of personal conduct. Mill sought to establish a scale of gradation for any discussion of happiness and pleasure. He noted that it is

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[8]McClendon summarises his career emphasis on peacemaking in his final autobiographical article published the month of his death: 'The Radical Road One Baptist Took', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74 (October 2000), pp. 503-510. Similarly, McClendon focuses the message of biblical narratives for Christians in the life and ministry of Jesus of whom he judges to be a pacifist. Of Jesus, McClendon writes: 'He evoked and guided a program of nonviolent action that transformed human conduct for its participants. The core of that program lies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; cf. Luke 6:20-49); it was inwardly but also outwardly oriented; its theme was the love of enemies; its focus, in light of God's mighty signs and the inbreaking of the end, was the building of a community that could survive the dying of an old age while with its Lord it anticipated the new'. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, *Volume I*, revised edition. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 309. See further, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'The Church Seeks a Peaceable Culture', *The Gilbert Lecture* (Pasadena, Calif.: Pasadena Church of the Brethren, 1996) and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Peacemakers of Christian Thought* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1962).

[9] McClendon, *Ethics,* pp. 41-42.

[10] Ibid.

not the deciding agent's own happiness that is used as the measure of happiness, but that of all concerned. Characteristic of the scientific presuppositions of its time, utilitarianism required that the deciding agent remain as 'impartial and disinterested' as an unknowing spectator.[11]

McClendon was no more enamored with the deontological, rule-based ethics of German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) than he was with the conclusions of the utilitarians. Kant's understanding of ethics asked the decision-maker to raise within oneself the question of one's 'duty' (from the Greek *deon*). The central ethical question for Kant's approach could be stated: What individual maxim or precept could be universalised so that it could be understood as a principle for society as a whole? From the view of a 'categorical imperative' a person should act in such a way that everyone else would act in the same manner. While Kant's deontological ethics dismisses the concern for consequences as understood in utilitarianism, it replaces that concern with action based on principle. Nonetheless rule-based ethics ignores the character of the one deciding and the reality and character of the communities out of which a person must act. Again, Enlightenment ethics have eliminated the crucial role of the person making the decision.[12]

McClendon, like John Howard Yoder before him, critiqued Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism as the theological offspring of Enlightenment ethics; as such Niebuhr's Christian realism inevitably removed any reference to the way of Jesus. Niebuhr's Christian realism seemed logically linked to consequence-oriented utilitarianism, and utilitarianism simply displayed no concern for the qualities of character in the individual and the community.[13] McClendon quotes Edmund Pincoffs in support of his argument: 'Aristotle did not give open lectures; St. Paul did not write open letters. When they used the word 'we', they spoke from within a community of expectations and ideals; a community within which character was cultivated'.[14]

McClendon observed that the field of ethics had so narrowed its focus that morality could be summed up in a single act, and in so doing the field had jettisoned the character of the person who acts. For McClendon, a person's character is a development over time for good or bad and paradoxically it is the 'cause and consequence of what' the person does.[15]

> The characterless rubber-ball person may bounce until he kills, and that killing may be for a fleeting 'motive' – anger, or envy, or bloodlust. And the *act* may

[11] Ibid., p. 71.
[12]Ibid., pp. 70-75.
[13]See McClendon's critique of Niebuhrian realism in, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 23-28.
[14]Edmund Pincoffs, 'Quandary Ethics', *Mind*, (October 1971), p. 570 as quoted in *Biography as Theology*, p. 22.
[15] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 14.

> be truly bad. Yet we may be inclined to say of the rubber ball himself that he has not yet risen to the level of badness. We would say this, for example, of a child whose characteristic ways were not yet shaped, but also of a pitiable social psychopath.[16]

To have character is to enter into a new level of morality where one's continuities, interconnections, and integrity are incorporated into one's actions. Action flows from the character of a person and simple decision-making strategies do not provide clues to the depth of ethical action needed to sustain a person or a community.

McClendon turned his attention to the study of character in an orderly and circumspect manner by paying attention to a person's 'convictions'. According to McClendon, convictions are 'our persuasions, the beliefs we embody with some reason, guiding all our thought, shaping our lives'. His (and James Smith's) definition: 'A conviction is a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not be easily abandoned, and it cannot be abandoned without making X a significantly different person or community than before'.[17]

McClendon embeds the development of a person's character via the convictions he or she holds in the character shaping function of community, an often overlooked feature in the ethics of decision-making. Inversely, the individual may affect the character of the community in which the individual lives. The individual 'acts back' on the community which has effectively shaped him or her. The 'ethics of character' is in reality the 'ethics of character-in-community'.[18]

McClendon ties the themes of biography, character, and community to the powerful influence of an 'image'.

> By images, I mean metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such, they bear the content of faith itself.[19]

The images to which McClendon refers are those 'canonical metaphors' that give definition to the character of a community. These canonical metaphors converge in an individual's life to shape the way the individual sees things. These shaping images in turn construct the individual's character by the individual's imitative action. When an individual lives his or her life under

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[16] Ibid., p. 30.

[17] James Wm. McClendon, Jr. with James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, revised edition (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994) pp. 5, 81-90.

[18] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 29.

[19] Ibid., 96-97. McClendon builds his early understanding of 'images' from Austin Farrer's discussion of the significance of images for theological reflection. McClendon, however, extends this discussion to show the character developmental nature of an image in a teleological sense.

the vision of these dominant images, he or she embodies the image of that vision for others. For McClendon, this is the meaning of 'religion'. Religion provides a repository of images, the community in which character is formed, and the ethics or practices of the community that flow from this process.

Character formation is the primary starting point for theology and constitutive for the study of ethics—the act of consciously reflecting on the images in a community which shapes the individual and in turn the individual's imitation of the image in a local context shapes the community's character. For McClendon, 'theology' is 'the discovery, understanding, or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is'.[20]

Throughout the corpus of McClendon's writing he provides biographies reflecting the embodiment of communal and personal convictions demonstrating how each influences the other. Take for example the lives of Dag Hammarskjold and Martin Luther King, Jr. McClendon identified key biblical images or root metaphors that shaped the lives of each.[21] In *Ethics*, McClendon examines the lives of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards as examples of 'Body Ethics' and the ethical practices related to the erotic and the common life of Christians. Under the rubric of 'Social Ethics' McClendon identifies the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to illustrate how Christian convictions are lived amidst difficult social and political circumstances. Interestingly, McClendon suggested that the Confessing Church's resistance to the Nazi regime in World War II was bound to fail because it is only in communities that practices are established, performed, and maintained.[22] Practices, the living out of cherished convictions, which run counter to the redemptive model of Jesus' life are transformed into raw powers that need prophetic correction.[23] In the third and final strand of *Ethics* McClendon identifies 'Anastatic' or 'Resurrection Ethics'. Illustrating resurrection ethics, McClendon invoked the life of Roman Catholic Dorothy Day with her vision for a social utopia that she linked with her pacifist convictions. Day's life spanned a desperately troubled period in American history as her life was etched against the Great Depression, through World War II and the Civil Rights movement. Building on Day's biography, McClendon argued that peacemaking is the set of practices that brings

[20]McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 23.
[21]McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, pp. 39-85.
[22]McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 207.
[23] Ibid., p. 173.

together all three strands of the ethical life: the organic, the social, and the eschatological.[24]

The destinies of these lives were 'chiseled out' in a dialogue between the critical situations in their lives and the powerful images they held.[25] Character formation, whether of the individual or the community as a whole, demands a chronicle of memory and some form of emplotment or intentionality.[26]

Some critics have challenged McClendon's dependence on the narrative assessment of ethics as myopic, seeing the world only through the life stories and assumptions of a single communal identity.[27] Others critics wonder how McClendon can possibly justify one particular communal set of convictions or character over against the variety of so many conflicting narrative communities? To this critique he responded that the seeming conflicting truth claims of diverse communities 'measure and define each other'.[28] For this reason, Christianity itself is a contested concept.[29] In the aftermath of a Constantinian Christendom, local communities of faith bear the burden of demonstrating that they are communities formed in the character and way of Jesus. The testimony of local communities will be judged by other active living communities that have been shaped by any number of narratives and diverse convictions. The plurality of cultures, religions, and experiences in the world means that the Christian witness is only one among many 'clashing stories'. To be one-voice-among-many, however, means that the way one engages the convictions of other communities will itself act as a testimony to the eschatological hope embedded in the Christian story of peacemaking.

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[24] McClendon, 'Radical Road', p. 510.

[25] McClendon, 'Biography as Theology', *Cross Currents* 21 (1971), p. 416.

[26]McClendon in 1974 was significantly ahead of his time with regard to character formation and the checks and balances necessary for forming theology with reference to inside and outside stories of oneself. Note McClendon's use of the critique of biography and autobiography by Herbert Fingarette in *Self Deception*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). Compare with Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1975).

[27]See Robert Barron, 'Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.', *Modern Theology* 18:2 (2002), p. 270. McClendon's systematic theological project has received multiple critical reviews to date. For consideration, see Richard J. Mouw, 'Ethics and Story: A Review Article', *The Reformed Journal* 37 (1987), pp. 22-27; Stanley Hauerwas, 'Reading McClendon Takes Practice: Lessons in the Craft of Theology', *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15 (1997), pp. 235-250; Willie James Jennings, 'Recovering the Radical Reformation for Baptist Theology: An Assessment of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.'s *Doctrine'*, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24 (1997), pp. 181-193; and Ralph C. Wood, 'James Wm. McClendon, Jr.'s *Doctrine*: An Appreciation', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24 (1997), pp. 195-199.

[28] James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and Nancey Murphy, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 343.

[29] McClendon appears to be indebted to the work of Stephen K. Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1984).

Once this narrative identity is acknowledged in human community the role of events-action, characters-community, the environment-setting, and character formation all begin to situate McClendon's understanding of the church as the intentional community of practices that constitute a people based on the stories of Scripture that find their focus in Jesus Christ.[30] The function, then, of Christian theology has to do with the transformation of those convictions generated by a shared and lived story, one whose focus is Jesus of Nazareth and the Kingdom he proclaims—a story that requires such discovery, such understanding, such transformation to be true to itself as the body of Christ in the world.[31]

Christian convictions, rightly understood, are not 'so many propositions to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer'.[32] These convictions are inextricably interwoven with ecclesial practices such as baptism and Eucharist, hospitality, forgiveness, reconciliation, peacemaking, and the mutual bearing of burdens, where they 'give shape to actual lives and actual communities'.[33]

McClendon privileges the construction of a 'local theology' in dialogue with the greater church tradition and this local theology is not determined by some 'essentialist' agenda external to the local congregation. A local theology begins with a specific local church setting. Local theologies begin by observational means, identifying what questions and convictions are embedded in the community. This contextualisation of theology is identity oriented, seeking to preserve the uniqueness of a local community's expression of Christ's lordship and yet, it is a theology that risks engagement with the world beyond its boundaries. It is social change-oriented, seeking to allow Christ's lordship to change the local setting.

The local community of faith finds itself in a constant cycle of reformation. Often this reformation takes place in conversation with the church's history by reframing that history as a collection of local theologies, a repository of biographies and memory that have been maintained for the purpose of guidance. If tradition is seen as a series of local theologies that grew up in response to needs of communities in particular contexts, then tradition itself becomes a collection of nurturing case studies for the local church context.[34]

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[30] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 309-310.
[31] Ibid., p. 330.
[32] Ibid., p. 333.
[33] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 37.
[34]In the third volume of McClendon's systematic *Witness,* a great deal of discussion is given to the actual locus of theological authority. If theology proper is based in character building in the community of convictions and practices, then the place of the academy is secondary. In fact, philosophical theological foundations are replaced with 'Theology as a science of convictions' (See McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 189-203). McClendon explains that these convictions and practices are the 'primary theology' and he sees 'secondary theology' as the concern of universities which seek to evaluate and legitimate

Local theologies are usually developed as a collaborative effort of community insiders, yet they do not shy away from dialogue with community outsiders. The world where the local community is planted serves as the locus of its character display and testimony. Similarly, the local community cannot thrive apart from the repository of images and convictions held in trust by the greater community of saints and Scripture who have gone before. This dialectic between tradition and the local context notwithstanding, it is the local community of faith that provides the context whereby a 'science of convictions' becomes ethics. The agenda for systematic theology in the academy—method, reflection, and application—is now reversed in the life and writing of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.: action or practice, then reflection, and testimony chart the new course.

The Unfolding Story

If we acknowledge McClendon's theological method rooted in the practice of the local community of faith, then we will be more intentional about narrating the diversity of our theological history outside the European-American context. As a thought experiment in such hybridity we turn to the Philippines. The seven thousand islands of what is today the Philippines sprawl for approximately a thousand miles from the north to the south. Of these seven thousand islands only about one thousand are inhabited, and fewer than five hundred are larger than one square mile. The flora, fauna, and topography of these islands exemplify the kind of bio-diversity and variety of terrain that hosts the cultural and ethnic mosaic that has come to represent the Philippines.

José P. Rizal (19 June 1861-30 December 1896) and Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr. (7 July 1864-10 October 1938), are two nineteenth century Filipinos who may serve as models for such a genealogy of history.[35] Rizal was the most prominent advocate for reforms in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial era. He is regarded as the foremost Filipino patriot and listed as one of the national heroes of the Philippines by National Heroes Committee. Rizal's 1896 military trial and execution at the age of thirty-five made him a martyr of the Philippine Revolution.

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various expressions of primary theology. Often, however, the primary theology is forgotten or lost in the process (Myers, 'Embodying the 'Great Story''). In order to describe the intent of McClendon's discussion of 'primary theology' discussed in his third volume *Doctrine*, pp. 23-24, 33, 46-48, I have incorporated the language of 'local theology' as developed in Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), pp. 119-121.

[35] See an excellent analysis of the work of José P. Rizal and Isabelo de los Reyes by Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (New York: Verso, 2005). Anderson provides content for the developing nationalism in the Southeast Asian region in both *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004) and *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 1991).

Rizal attended the Ateneo Municipal de Manila, earning a Bachelor of Arts. He enrolled in Medicine and Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas; Santo Tomas, founded in 1611, is the oldest university in Asia. From there he traveled to Madrid, Spain, where he continued his studies at the Universidad Central de Madrid, earning the degree of Licentiate in Medicine. He attended the University of Paris and earned a second doctorate at the University of Heidelberg in Germany.

Rizal was conversant in twenty-two languages and was a prolific poet, essayist, correspondent, and novelist whose most famous works were his two novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El filibusterismo*.[36] Both novels are social commentaries on the Philippines that formed the nucleus of literature that inspired dissent among peaceful reformists and spurred the militancy of armed revolutionaries against the Spanish colonial authorities.

Noli Me Tangere was Rizal's first novel. He was 26 years old at the time of its publication. This novel and its sequel, *El filibusterismo*, were banned in the Philippines because of their portrayal of corruption and abuse by the country's Spanish government and clergy. Copies of the book were smuggled in nevertheless, and when Rizal returned to the Philippines after completing medical studies he was summoned to the Governor General's Palace at Malacañang and told of the charge that *Noli Me Tangere* contained subversive material. The Governor General was satisfied that the novel was not politically subversive, but Rizal was unable to offer resistance against the pressure of the church against the book. The persecution can be discerned from Rizal's letter to at friend:

> My book made a lot of noise; everywhere, I am asked about it. They wanted to anathematize me ['to excommunicate me'] because of it... I am considered a German spy, an agent of Bismarck, they say I am a Protestant, a freemason, a sorcerer, a damned soul and evil. It is whispered that I want to draw plans, that I have a foreign passport and that I wander through the streets by night....[37]

Rizal opened his enraged novel *Noli Me Tangere* with a preface addressed to his homeland:

> Deseando tu salud que es la nuestra, y buscando el major tratamiento, hare' contigo le que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponianlos en las gradas del templo, para que cada persona que viniese de invocar a' la Divinidad les propusiese un remedio.[38]

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[36] José P. Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, (Touch me not), trans. by Soledad Locsin (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1996) and *El filibusterismo,* (The filibuster), (Manila: Instituto Nacional de Historia, 1990).
[37] Anderson, *Specter*, p. 228.
[38] Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, p. 16. Anderson's translation to English: 'Desiring your well-being, which is our own, and searching for the best cure [for your disease], I will do you as the ancients did with the afflicted: exposed them on the steps of the temple so that each one who came to invoke the Divinity would propose a cure'.

Rizal was first exiled from Manila and later arrested for inciting rebellion, based largely on his writings. Rizal was executed in Manila on 30 December 1896.

This book was instrumental in creating a unified Filipino national identity and consciousness. The 'Filipino' by definition had been those persons residing in the archipelago under the rule of Spain. It was an external attribution as many natives previously identified with their respective ethno-linguistic regions. *The novel identified for the first time a protagonist that was unified under slavery against the colonial master.* It caricatured and exposed various elements in colonial society, *thus giving birth to a psychology of resistance and an alternative reading of history*. The book, *Noli Me Tangere*, indirectly influenced a revolution, even though Rizal actually advocated direct representation to the Spanish government and a larger role for the Philippines within Spain's political affairs.

As a political figure, José Rizal was the founder of La Liga Filipina, a civic organisation that subsequently gave birth to the Katipunan led by Andrés Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo. Rizal believed that the only justification for national liberation and self-government is the restoration of the dignity of the people. The general consensus among Rizal scholars, however, attributed his martyred death as the catalyst that precipitated the Philippine Revolution and the forerunner of all the other anti-colonial movements in the Pacific Rim.[39]

Rizal's advocacy of liberty through peaceful means rather than by violent revolution makes him Asia's first modern non-violent proponent of freedom. Forerunner of Gandhi and contemporary of Tagore and Sun Yat Sen, all four created a new climate of thought throughout Asia, leading to the attrition of colonialism and the emergence of new Asiatic nations by the end of World War II. In *Noli Me Tangere* Rizal stated that if European civilisation had nothing better to offer, colonialism in Asia was doomed.[40]

Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr., a contemporary of Rizal, was a prominent Filipino politician, writer and labour activist. He was the founder of the Iglesia Filipina Independente or Aglipayan Church, an independent Philippine national church. For his writings and activism with labour unions, he was called the Father of Filipino Socialism.

As a young man, he turned to writing as a career; he became a journalist, editor, and publisher in Manila, and was imprisoned in 1897 for

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[39] Anderson, *Specter*, p. 227.

[40] Pascual H. Poblete, *BUHAY AT MGA GINAWÂ NI DR. JOSÉ RIZAL*, (*The Life and Works of Dr. José Rizal*), The Project Gutenburg eBook (in Tagalog) (2006), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18282/18282-h/18282-h.htm and 'Selection and Proclamation of National Heroes and Laws Honoring Filipino Historical Figures', Reference and Research Bureau Legislative Research Service, House of Congress; available at http://www.congress.gov.ph/download/researches/rrb_0301_1.pdf, accessed 13 August 2014.

revolutionary activities. He was deported to Spain, where he was jailed until 1898. While living and working in Madrid, he was influenced by the writings of European socialists and Marxists. Reyes founded the first labour union in the country upon his return in 1901. He also was active in seeking independence from the United States.

At the age of 23, De los Reyes won a silver medal at the *Exposición Filipina* in Madrid for his Spanish-language book entitled *El folk-lore filipino* (Filipino folklore).[41] It was the same year that the Filipino writer José Rizal published his first novel, *Noli Me Tangere* in Berlin. As a teenager, De los Reyes had been intrigued by a growing interest in the 'new science' of *el saber popular* (folklore). Manila's Spanish newspaper *La Oceania Española* asked readers to contribute articles on *el folk-lore* and offered directions on how to collect material. Two months later De los Reyes set to work on the folklore of Ilocos, Malabon, and Zambales, and what he called *el folk-lore filipino*. It became one of the greatest passions of his life. By 1886, as the French were starting serious study of folklore in relation to their own native traditions, De los Reyes was already producing a manuscript for publication.[42]

Isabelo de los Reyes, like Rizal, published in Europe so as to demonstrate the hybridity of their historical perspective. Their publications found their way back to the Philippines and became the foundation of a context ripe for political revolution. When De los Reyes referred to the 'Filipino' he, like Rizal, had imagined a psychology and community independent from the external Spanish or American attribution. Both Rizal and now De los Reyes envisioned a historical identity told from within, a local story and identity. An example from *El folk-lore Filipino* sets the perspective:

> The Ilocanos, especially those from Ilocos Norte, before starting to cut down trees in the mountains, sing the following verse:
> Bari', bari'!
> Dika agunget pari
> Ta pumukan kami
> Iti pabakirda kami.
> Literally translated these lines mean: bari-bari [an Ilocano interjection for which there is no equivalent in Spanish], do not get upset, compadre, for we are only cutting because we have been ordered to do so.[43]

Here De los Reyes positions himself firmly within the Ilocano world, the language of much of the working class of late nineteenth and early twentieth

[41] Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr., *El Folk-lore Filipino*, English trans. Salud C Dizon and Maria Elinora P Imson (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1994).
[42] Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, pp. 9-16.
[43] Ibid, pp. 258-259.

century Manila.[44] He knows what the words mean, but his readers do not: to them (and by this he intends not only Spaniards, but also other Europeans, as well as non-Ilocano natives of the archipelago) this experience is closed. The reader is confronted by the incomprehensible original Ilocano. Reyes leaves it at that, no speculations. A rupture of universality established in the particularity of the *saber popular*; and with the new particularity comes the new place from which to begin the negotiation of community.

Both José P. Rizal and Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr. articulate reconstructions of the history of the Filipino people that begin with dangerous, previously undisclosed memories and provide a voice for a future community**.** Prior to their writings, no imagined community was perceived possible as an internal narrative. 'Filipino' was a colonial term, designated from the outside. Their contestation of the 'Filipino' identity both from the historical novel and from the ethnographic encyclopedia of folk knowledge constituted a claim of 'somebodiness' that was not recognised prior. They uncovered dangerous memories, memories that held anamnesic power and also became the starting point for a new community.

The emergence of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente carried forward the work and spirit of both Rizal and De los Reyes.[45] In 1902, the members of the Unión Obrera Democrática Filipina broke with the Roman Catholic Church due to the alleged mistreatment of Filipinos by Spanish priests and as a result of the execution of Rizal under Spanish colonial rule.

Gregorio Aglipay was a revolutionary Roman Catholic priest from Ilocos Norte who would later be excommunicated by then Archbishop of Manila Bernardino Nozaleda y Villa for inciting schism with the Pope.[46] Isabelo de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay actively sought to reform the Filipino Catholic clergy. Following the Philippine-American War, Aglipay and De los Reyes founded the Philippine Independent Church in 1902. The new church rejected the spiritual authority of the Pope (then Pope Leo XIII) and abolished the celibacy requirement for priests, allowing them to marry.[47]

Under the American colonial period, the American government returned to the Catholic Church those parish buildings that had become Aglipayan during the Philippine revolutionary period. Today, however, Aglipayans in the Philippines number at least two million members, with most from the northern part of Luzon, especially in the Ilocos Region. The church is the second-largest single Christian denomination in the country

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[44] Benedict Anderson, *The Age of Globalization: Anarchists and The Anticolonial Imagination* (New York: Verso, 2013), p. 227.
[45] Melba Padilla Maggay, *A Clash of Cultures: Early American Protestant Missions and Filipino Religious Consciousness* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2011), pp. 11-12.
[46] Ibid., pp. 23-24.
[47] Iglesia Filipina Independiente. n.d., available on http://www.ifi.ph/history, accessed 9 October, 2014.

after the Roman Catholic Church. It is the only Philippine church that is founded in the dangerous memory of the 'once, but no longer colonized' Filipino religious consciousness and thus carries the greatest hope for *anastasis*, resurrection community.

Charles Long has referred to this type of historical retrieval as 'crawling back' through one's history.[48] When the practice is explicitly linked to relationships of power, it constitutes the practice that Michel Foucault referred to as a *genealogy*.[49] Contrary to the common sense notion that since history moves forward in time from past to present, historiography must move in the same direction. Foucault argued that historiography begins with the location of the one who is telling the history, and moves backwards into time to interpret and transform the past. A genealogy may operate on the same field of historical experiences and evidence traversed by the historiography of domination, but it does so seeking to subvert the 'tyranny of globalising discourses', said Foucault.[50] It is the union of 'erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today'.[51] Thus a genealogy entertains the claims of local, discontinuous, and illegitimate historical knowledge—knowledge which has in many cases been separated from its material social locations, or knowledge which has in many cases been partially if not totally erased by the effects of domination.

The starting point of all Christian theology is the dangerous memory of Christ crucified and the testimony of the unshackled resurrection. James McClendon reminds us that it is our Christian global mission invoking *anamnesis* to open our way of being in the world to anastatic, resurrected, community.[52]

MABUHAY[53]

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[48] Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretations of Religion* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 9.
[49] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge:Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed., Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 83.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith In History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* trans. by David Smith (New York: Cross Roads, 1980.), pp. 66-68, 200-204. See also Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis As Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000) and Darryl M. Trimiew, *Voices of the Silenced: The Responsible Self in a Marginalized Community* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1993); McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 276.
[53] Tagalog exclaimation and imperative: 'Live into an ever progressing future!', my translation.

Wisdom, Living Tradition and the Holy Spirit: A Conversation between Paul Fiddes and Yves Congar

Henrikas Žukauskas

Abstract. The recent work of Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes looks at biblical wisdom as practical and also as wisdom that expresses God's own creativity. Both aspects interrelate in a theology of creation. The work on tradition by Catholic theologian Yves Congar looks at living tradition as human-divine reality, with the church as subject and the Holy Spirit as transcendent Subject. Some themes in both works overlap, but it is not immediately clear how they might complement one another. Congar's later work on the Holy Spirit presents human participation in the divine, but the role of the Holy Spirit in creation is not developed. I would like to explore how the theology of living tradition (Congar) might absorb and profit from the creative participation of the creature in God's own creativity (Fiddes). This will help to extend the trajectory of Congar's thought in affirming the place for human creativity.

Keywords: tradition, wisdom, creation, creativity.

Paul Fiddes, a Baptist theologian, presents wisdom as both daily and practical, but also as wisdom of participation in God. The latter is the knowledge of the divine, concerned with contemplative and creative human participation in God's own creativity.[1] Fiddes presents a theology of creation rooted in participation in the Trinity.[2] I would like to juxtapose this work with the work on tradition by the Roman Catholic theologian Yves Congar.[3] Congar articulates a living tradition as human-divine reality. This living tradition is an action of the church, but also the action of the Holy Spirit. Both works overlap in the theological approach to creation and creativity as they seek to relate human involvement and the presence of the self-revealing God. But how does this participation in God affect human creativity? Emphasis on human freedom goes together with the emphasis

[1] Paul S. Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 11.
[2] Ibid., p. 13
[3] Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966).

on the Holy Spirit in Congar's work.[4] I suggest that this freedom lacks the ingredient of creativity, which is present in the work of Paul Fiddes.

Context of Congar's Theology of Tradition

Yves Congar is an influential Roman Catholic theologian whose life work has spanned the greater part of the twentieth century. He contributed to ecclesiology, ecumenism, and the theology of the Holy Spirit. I will mainly focus on his work on the theology of tradition. His work is sensitive to the issues of the world. He focused on tradition right before and during the Second Vatican Council. The council was marked by a return to the sources, a retrieval of neglected traditions, and a search for the apostolic face of the church.[5] But there was also 'aggiornamento'—the bringing up to date of the Roman Catholic Church as it faced the created and developing world.[6] These two aspects complemented one another: the church turned to its living tradition and towards creation. This has marked a shift in Congar's work. The work on tradition is in between his focus on the church and his later work on the theology of the Holy Spirit. Both the turn toward the sources and the world, and the turn from the focus on the church to the Spirit, were connected.

Already early in his work Congar was looking at the part the church plays in the growing unbelief in the Western world.[7] Initially he thought that a renewal of the church was enough, since the face of the church belied rather than expressed its true nature to the world. But later Congar argued that it was necessary to go further than the theology of the church. He suggested turning to the idea of the revelation of the living God, which is 'the indissoluble link in Judaeo-Christian revelation between theology, anthropology and cosmology, the living God, man and the world'.[8] As these realities were intimately connected, the lack of the theological vision and demonstration of this connection was an obstacle to belief. This required presenting the relation between creation and the Kingdom of God, and at the same time turning to the living God. This is the context of his theology of tradition. It is an attempt to take the question of tradition from the strictures of (ecclesial) apologetics and find its place in the relationship

[4] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. II (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 130.
[5] Gerald O'Collins, 'Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?' *Theological Studies* 73:4 (2012), pp. 768-794.
[6] See Ibid., p. 772. On the distinction and complementarity of both impulses, see John W. O'Malley, 'Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?' *Theological Studies* 67:1 (2006), pp. 3-33, here pp. 13 f.
[7] Yves Congar, "Une conclusion théologique à la enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance," in *La vie intellectuelle*, 37:2 (1935), pp. 214-249.
[8] Yves Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (London: G. Chapman, 1966), p. 23.

between a human being and God. This latter aspect allows viewing tradition in the wider context of the relation of God and creation.

Congar and the Turn to the Living Tradition

Tradition for Congar is primarily the reality of delivery, of transmission. In this general sense it dominates the whole economy of salvation as its principle. How is this possible? Congar sees the economy as self-communication of God. God the Father is the source of all created things but also by procession the source of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. Thus, the Father delivers the Son for the life of humanity and then delivers the Spirit to the church, which becomes an extension of divine communion. The divine transmission continues in the human transmission.[9]

Consequently, the theology of tradition has to be viewed as an attempt by Congar to articulate the relationship of humanity and God in this world. Tradition is the way he binds together God, human beings, and creation. This revolves around the two missions of God, that of the Son and of the Spirit.

The 'world' does not only set the backdrop of his work, but it is closely knit into the theology of tradition; it finds its sense in Christ. He calls the Scriptural-patristic approach to the Scriptures *sapiental* (within wisdom tradition), as it embraces the three books of the human soul, creation, and Scriptures. It is founded on two convictions, that 'everything is the work of Word', and that God communicates in realities rather than in words alone. Thus, the reading of the Bible assumes that the books (human soul, world, Scriptures) interpret one another and the words of God are interpreted and make sense as one lives a life which God gives.[10] The meaning of the Scriptures[11] centres on the covenant in Jesus Christ, his Paschal passion and exaltation and the inclusion of the whole people of God into his death and exaltation. This means that the covenant is realized in Christ *in transitus* and in the church. Both are related through a typology, because they are connected in the divine intention. The 'events of history are the realization of a Word that is all dynamic', which means that they are eschatological.[12]

The main point is that there is continuity between the life of Christ and the church. The fact that the history of salvation is, indeed, historical,

[9] Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 15.
[10] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 65. On Congar as a 'sapiental' theologian vis-à-vis Lutheran '*theologia crucis',* see Fergus Kerr, 'Yves Congar and Thomism', in Gabriel Flynn, ed., *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), pp. 92-94.
[11] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 68.
[12] Ibid., pp. 69, 70.

means that humans and the Spirit make it together: 'a history which is made by men *and the Holy Spirit*, together'.[13] The history of salvation, the Scripture, and human lives are inspired and bound together by the same prophetic Spirit.[14] This historical aspect, which showed the cooperation between them, however, was not visible. The Fathers looked at these events of Scripture for a model received from tradition or from above to reproduce.[15] While tradition was 'a living transmission of lived realities',[16] they had a consciousness of this reality of the church, which came from God and his eternity. But since the Scriptures were used as illustrations,[17] the manifestation of God's plan to raise humans to divine life, this approach veiled the historicity of mysteries. Congar notes 'a certain exemplarist, and even essentialist spirit'.[18]

For Congar, on the other hand, the truth is historical and this affects the view of the role of the Spirit. For the Fathers inspiration bore a supra-temporal and supra-historic content. The Spirit was 'the principle of all progress beyond time, space, the multiplicity and differentiation of spirits'.[19] So it is understandable that once Congar is set to develop not only the progress *beyond* time and space, but also *within* time and space, he turns to the theology of the Spirit. This addition would supplement the focus on 'the manifestation' of eternal mystery with the action of the living Lord and the human community *in history*. Congar also wishes to affirm that the covenant and the 'events', signs, are historical. It is this development that linked and affirmed the historicity of human existence and the work of the Spirit. This also poses the question, aren't the human peculiarities of creation of secondary importance? In other words, is there something that the world and its development contribute? Congar proposes accepting the importance and contribution of historical existence. To affirm this existence he leans towards the theology of the Spirit.

Paul Fiddes and the Book of the World

Paul Fiddes goes further and presents human beings as primarily immersed in the world. He seeks to transcend the view of the self as a mere thinking subject with a purpose to control the world. He begins from the 'embodiment, connectedness, and participation' of creatures, living with

[13] Ibid., p. 75, Congar's italics.
[14] Ibid., pp. 75-77.
[15] Ibid., p. 78.
[16] On tradition as transmission as the very 'principle of the whole economy of salvation', see Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, p. 15.
[17] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* p. 79
[18] Ibid., p. 82.
[19] Ibid., p. 83.

and participating in the life of others.[20] The scriptural view of wisdom allows Fiddes to formulate the way this being in the world is a participation in God. He distinguishes two dimension of 'wisdom': first, that which is called 'wisdom of observation,' in which wisdom comes from within engagement in the world, the observation of things, and the exercise of judgment. The second dimension expresses 'God's own creativity', the wisdom that was present in the beginning of the world. It is called the 'wisdom of participation',[21] since it is contemplative participation in divine knowledge. These two are interwoven and both are necessary. Wisdom is participation in the whole; life means living in tune with the rhythms of 'reality larger than ourselves', the Trinity. Fiddes thus proposes the theology of creation, 'rooted in participation in a God, who exists in triune relations, and who relates to what is created in all its diversity'.[22]

Does the wider view of wisdom as proposed by Fiddes have something significant to contribute to Congar's contemplative approach? I propose that it does. In affinity with Congar's insistence on the 'three books', Fiddes helps by integrating the third book, that of the world.[23] With the help of French philosopher Jacques Derrida he presents the world around us as a system of signs, a text, 'the structures called "real", "economic", "historical", "socio-institutional", in short: all possible referents'.[24] There is nothing outside this text. Human beings are immersed into this world as text, which is prior to them. But how, then, does this affect the relations of human beings, the world, and God? Fiddes (following Derrida) criticises the use of sign as means of control by conscious subjects, since this does not respect the genuine 'otherness' of the world and people. Such a view of the presence of the conscious being (since consciousness is 'a self-perception of presence'[25]) was enforced on the 'other'. The problem was not, however, with a subject as such, but rather with the openness of the responsible subject to the 'freeplay' or 'game' of 'undecidability'[26] of the text of the world. Thus Fiddes opposes this understanding to domineering imposition of presence through 'thought', a metaphysical system. The view of the subject as primarily immersed in the world is close, according to Fiddes, to Biblical wisdom literature.[27]

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[20] Paul S. Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 5.
[21] Ibid., p. 11.
[22] Ibid., p. 10.
[23] Ibid., p. 140.
[24] Jacques Derrida, 'Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,' in *Limited Inc.* Vol. 10. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2008), p. 148 as quoted in Fiddes, p. 140.
[25] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 147 in Fiddes, p. 142.
[26] Fiddes, p. 145.
[27] Ibid., p. 146.

Human creative cooperation

Congar viewed theology as wisdom [28] and as participation in divine knowledge. Though the proposal of Fiddes is different, it is in line with Congar's emphasis on human cooperation with God. Fiddes goes even further. He argues that if there is any analogy between what is humanly known as wisdom and the divine wisdom, God must be involved in the text of the world as 'God's 'context' in time and space. But what to do with the simplicity and the self-sufficiency of God, which claims that God cannot be conditioned by any creaturely reality? Fiddes continues that the view that 'God cannot have any potentials which are not actualized' results in a conclusion that the eternal God lives in eternity, which is 'conceived as a simultaneous moment, knowing past, present, and future in one instant flash of perception'.[29] This indeed looks like the imposition of the presence on the 'other'. And this extends to the human subject. Through God as Logos, God validates human reason, logos, as present to God's self without the need of the world. Furthermore, Fiddes continues, the self-existence and 'pure act' of God need not mean the self-sufficiency of God. Fiddes (together with Karl Barth) suggests viewing God as infinite, but not excluding finite, and who determines to be affected by the world.[30] Finally Fiddes draws on Charles Hartshorne who proposed to conceive of God 'who knows the possibilities for what God and the world can achieve together in cooperation and co-creativity, but cannot experience them as actualities until they happen'.[31] Fiddes links such participation of God in time with 'the eternal desire of God to be creator'.[32]

Fiddes suggests that theology, because of its philosophical presuppositions concerning God, supressed the embodied creativity of creation. In such a way the third book, creation, is held in permanent subjection, and the three books, Scriptures, the human soul and creation, cannot interpret and interpenetrate one another. Congar's analysis of the Middle Ages could partially confirm that. But he views it primarily as the suppression of historicity. In the Middle Ages the Scripture was read in light of two other books, which brought out fully their significance.[33] There is a 'whole' of human beings, the world, salvation, and the communion of saints, which is the work of Wisdom, with regulating Scripture as summit. This was achieved through the concept of *auctoritas*—function, status of

[28] Yves Congar, *Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 175.
[29] Fiddes, p. 148.
[30] Ibid., p. 149.
[31] Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for our Time* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), quoted in Fiddes, p. 149.
[32] Fiddes, p. 150.
[33] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* p. 86.

entity, in its relation to source. The value of a thing is considered not in terms of historical, temporal genesis, but rather by its place in the hierarchy of the world and in the infallible truth 'in virtue of its function or status'.[34] The ultimate cause, God, is *auctor*, but *auctoritas* extended to what has been given by God, the gift of being true, expressing truth and his will.

This looks like the hierarchical participation in divine knowledge, which Fiddes seeks to dismantle, but there is one other important aspect. Congar shows that the understanding of revelation included human cooperation. And it was real participation. Subordinated to God as personally responsible *auctor*, cooperation 'benefits from the absolute guarantee attached to the first Truth'.[35] Thus the books of creation and soul reveal their full meaning in relation to Scripture. Scripture reveals their full significance in the church, which was viewed as the world retuned to God.[36] *Sapiental,* or the wisdom approach, was tied to church, and this meant the plenitude and life of creation. This emphasis on life comes together with emphasis on the Spirit. Scholastics attributed true and holy determinations of the *life* of the church to the '*revelatio, inspiratio, suggestio* of the Holy Spirit'.[37] So there was human cooperation in the revelation of God, which was worked out by the Spirit in inspiring and illuminating. However, the focus upon the transcendent real cause of truth overshadowed the historical dimension of existence and the work of the Spirit.[38]

Congar's account shows that to articulate human freedom and cooperation with God, he continually turns to the role the Spirit. But there is no mention of human creativity in this cooperation and the book of the world does not play any significant role. The whole concern with life seems to focus on the life of the church. This transfer and identification of wisdom with the life of the church raises a question. Does it not make the book of creation, the world, obsolete or subservient? In his later work on the church as the sacrament of salvation of the world, Congar writes that medieval Christianity lived without active reference, i.e. consciousness of the 'world' as beyond the church or facing it.[39] It lived in a rather homogenous environment, which was totally different from the questions that Vatican II had to address in contemporary world. It is thus necessary to maintain 'the spirit' of Congar and provide a theological demonstration of the intimate link between human beings, God, and the world. Since he

[34] Ibid., p. 90.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 91.
[37] Ibid., p. 92.
[38] Ibid., pp. 94 – 97.
[39] Yves Congar, *Un peuple messianique. L'Eglise, sacrement du salut. Salut et liberation* Cogitatio fidei 85 (Paris: Cerf, 1975), p. 58.

relies on 'sapiental' theology in his understanding of tradition, this 'sapiental' or wisdom aspect has to accommodate the book of creation in line with Judeo-Christian revelation.[40]

Fiddes' critique of the narrative of mediation

In seeking to accommodate creation into theology I find Paul Fiddes' perspective especially helpful. His starting point is the *directness* of the participation of creation in God as in the biblical Wisdom literature. This means that human-divine wisdom connects the wisdom as life in the world and participation in God.[41] He finds the Scholastic account of this participation lacking if compared to biblical Wisdom literature. If God perceives the essences directly, he does not see the world as mortals do and the immediate communion between the wise and wisdom, as described in Wisdom literature, is impossible.[42] Besides, he continues, in Scholastic theology the finite creatures themselves participate in a limited way. If the direct vision of God is eschatological, human beings participate in God only through analogy, by reflecting God and by being caused by God. For more direct participation the obvious connection between 'God's participation in God's own life in Trinity, and human participation in God' was necessary. Aquinas did come close. For him, Fiddes notes, the mind is the aspect of humanity that resembles God. So when the Father generates the Son with the intent to create the world and the human mind 'generates the word and "illuminates" the world in order to know God', these are alike. However, they do not merge into one activity and the directness of the participation as the one seen in Wisdom literature is not achieved.[43]

The most poignant point is the critique of what Fiddes calls the narrative of mediation. This narrative of mediation addresses the ontological gap between the material world of human persons and the transcendent world of the divine. It proposes an intermediate principle and in the case of early Christianity, it was the figure of Christ 'reconfigured as a cosmic mediator'.[44] Two ontological spheres were of 'unchanging, intellectual Being' and 'transient, material Becoming'. The Logos-Soul contemplated eternal ideas, 'thoughts in the mind of a Supreme God'.[45] Early Christian theologians modified these ideas—Logos was one with God, not only contemplated, but identical with the ideas of God. However, Fiddes argues, the Word of the Gospel of John, reflecting the Hebraic

[40] See Congar, *Dialogue between Christians*, p. 23.
[41] Fiddes, p. 204.
[42] Ibid., p. 205.
[43] Ibid., p. 206.
[44] Ibid., p. 209.
[45] Ibid., p. 210.

understanding of wisdom was reconfigured as the Idea of God spoken out, the Greek Logos. This did not neglect that the Logos became 'a human being in Jesus of Nazareth', but the Son of God was 'a mediator bridging an abyss between two worlds of reality'.[46] It is this that, according to Fiddes, denigrates the world of physical matter, loses interest in particular details, separates the two orders of reality, and is a narrative of domination.

In criticising the narrative of mediation Fiddes refers to the work of Colin Gunton, who does not abandon the paradigm of mediation (which Fiddes does). Gunton in his work points to the image of the 'two hands' of God by Irenaeus. It is here, according to Gunton, that classic Christian ontology is formulated.[47] God created with two hands; unlike paganism or neo-Platonism, there are no intermediate beings, but rather God himself creates. The Son and the Spirit 'mediate between the divine and created'. This image of two hands, together with the theology of the divine missions of the Son and the Spirit plays a central part in Congar's later Pneumatological work. He accepts that the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit, extended to the world, communicate grace. This is one of the 'most spacious ideas of mediation between the finite and the Infinite'.[48] Congar was particularly interested in how the two missions make the church, but he is conscious that their intent is the return of the cosmos to God. Congar actually bases the church as sacramental organism on the 'two missions'. The notion of sacrament thus gives a glimpse of how human participation in the divine actually works for Congar. In making the case that human participation in the divine is essentially sacramental, Congar once again refers to wisdom theology and human participation in divine missions.

Mediation as the 'logic of incarnation' *and* the immediacy of the Spirit

The sharp stance of Fiddes towards the narrative of mediation invites us to look more attentively at how Congar uses the concept. Congar argues for both: mediation and immediacy. It sometimes appears that he accepts that there are two orders, natural and supernatural. However, his approach towards mediation is based on incarnation, which forms the basis of *sapiental* (wisdom) theology. He affirms mediation over against the disruption in continuity of the consciousness of the church, which the Reformation brought about. *Sola Scriptura*, he argues, questioned the

[46] Ibid.
[47] Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 54.
[48] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. III (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 151. On the relation between 'two missions' and the 'two hands' of Irenaeus, see Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. II, p. 9.

consciousness that the Scriptures, the church, and tradition formed one whole.[49] On the other hand, the Reformation brought forth the importance of the spiritual and personal relationship between God and humanity.[50]

And yet this relationship, because of the loss of the previous spiritual whole, the reality of tradition, was, according to Congar, reduced. *Sola Scriptura* presented Scripture as the only link between humans and God. This was set over against the whole of Redemptive Incarnation and the realities deriving from it as 'the body of God's gift'.[51] On the other hand, for Congar the life of the church and liturgy is full-embodied contact with and participation in God. This is based on 'two missions'. The church is a pursuit of unity of two moments in the meeting of 'two supernaturals'. The first of them is the 'transmitted supernatural' (historical institution of the church, sacraments). It is derived from Christ and is mediated. The second is the 'promised personal supernatural' (the Spirit of Christ), which makes unique revelation and salvation 'a real objective presence' in the church. Congar affirms both mediation and immediacy.[52]

Such an approach to the church is based on the conviction that there is a *resonance* between creation, history, and the divine gift, Jesus Christ. Creation, as if sympathetically, vibrates towards him. Christ is both the Lord of the world and Redeemer. This means his entry into history had to reverberate in history, thus there is a *historic* continuity. This continuity is based on the fact that Christ instituted the church and there is a covenant established by God. It exists, according to Congar, in the sacraments, apostolic ministry, and Tradition. Thus the history of the church is not purely human history. The Holy Spirit as its efficacious principle is the source of life, salvation, and revelation in the history of the church.[53] Congar consequently criticizes the Reformation in that it equated the whole cosmic, historical, and earthly 'terrestrial moment of supernatural' with Scripture. It restricted the action of God to his Word, which was appropriated into consciousness by faith.[54] This restricted the bodily presence of the supernatural on earth. The relation of nature and grace, the link of the Incarnation of Christ and the Spirit, their sympathetic vibrations are key in relating human life and participation in God. Congar centres it

[49] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* pp. 116, 117.
[50] Ibid., pp. 142 – 145.
[51] Ibid., p. 146.
[52] On the 'way of mediation' and the 'way of immediacy', see Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (London: G. Chapman, 1986), p. 52.
[53] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* pp. 147, 148.
[54] Ibid., p. 148.

around two missions, that of the Son and of the Spirit. This relation forms the basis of the church.[55]

So, for Congar, the work of God in creation and redemption is one work. It is not broken by a distinction of natural and supernatural or dislocated by sin.[56] The world, human nature and reason are the 'work of the same Wisdom as the redemptive incarnation and our adoption in grace'. Revelation is not the only knowledge, *analogia entis* combines with *analogia fidei*.[57] The latter presupposes the first, includes and then confirms and completes it. Scripture is a gift of God and a means to reach through knowledge 'the reality of God's grace and gift'. The reality is transmitted, however, in a comprehensive and rich way. The real relationship with God is a reality to be possessed and not only notionally understood, a real communion with actually present gifts of God. There is no opposition between purity of witness (Protestant view) and fullness of heritage, 'purity and plenitude'.[58] Congar affirms both a normative model of written Word, and the Word as the self-gift of God entering history, in establishing 'a logic of incarnation, of life, of assimilation'.[59] This focus on incarnation, however, is at risk to make wisdom captive to the past and to an institution. The world, though resonating with God's gift, in Congar's account appears as a material and does not have much to contribute. The role of the Spirit, likewise, appears merely to quicken what Christ has instituted.

Congar, consequently, could profit from the criticism of the narrative of mediation, which Fiddes proposes. Fiddes' account of the immediate, direct presence of the created to the divine and of the divine to the created begins from creation and asks if creation and cosmos really matter. On the other hand, Congar's approach to mediation, 'a logic of incarnation', should not be easily dismissed. Congar's focus on 'two hands' suggests God's real and historic involvement with creation, the desire to return it to God, and outlines the role of the church.

The criticism of Fiddes applies to Congar's view of two orders, natural and supernatural. The historical view of the church allowed Congar to look at human involvement in the church seriously. But the disconcerting language of orders remained and it suggested the image of

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[55] For an appreciative and insightful Protestant critique of Congar's work on tradition see John Webster, 'Purity and Plenitude: Evangelical Reflections on Congar's *Tradition and Traditions*' in Gabriel Flynn, ed., *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*. Vol. 32 (Louvain: Petters Press/Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), pp. 43 ff.
[56] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 149.
[57] Ibid., p. 150.
[58] Ibid., p. 153.
[59] Ibid., p. 154.

ontological realms opposed to one another. There was a way out, however, and Congar was conscious of it. He criticised the view on 'supernatural' of the influential nineteenth century Catholic theologian M. J. Scheeben. Scheeben, Congar wrote, adopted the word 'supernatural' as a noun, rather than an adjective, and this hardened the distinction between the two main orders and implied the idea of a second nature (supernatural), above the first, but with a similar ontological consistency.[60] Congar proposed instead viewing nature as put by the Spirit and the Spirit's gifts of grace into a new relation with God, giving to this nature 'superior ordination', to accomplish its profound and supernatural aim.[61] This turn to the Spirit was consistent with the turn towards history and creation as a whole. It did not distinguish in a clear-cut way between the sacred and the profane, and it proposed a different angle. It suggested that theology begins with a dynamic and historical world, the reality of community, rather than a static and ontological state of things.

This approach to the world was developed in Congar's later Pneumatological work. The emphasis on the world and the emphasis on the Spirit go together and it affected his view of Jesus Christ. Congar proposes that the Word and the Spirit do God's work together.[62] He even discusses the issue of the autonomy of the Spirit. There are spiritual movements, he contends, which derive the way of life directly from the sources without mediation of clergy and emphasise the action of God 'here and now' in the whole process of salvation.[63] In Congar's framework of 'two missions', there is a way to the immediacy of the human-divine relationship. This relationship is a *personal* relationship and presents an intervention beside the instituted continuity. Congar consequently proposed 'two lines of action in God's work' as 'the way of mediation' and 'the way of immediacy'.[64] The two were related. The initiatives were not totally separated from the instituted means of grace, but there comes into the instituted framework 'an irreducibly personal factor'.[65] This emphasis on Pneumatology affected his Christology; Congar proposed a *Pneumatological* Christology. Thus the interaction of institution and intervention is undergirded by the interaction of Christ and the Spirit.[66] Even more, Christ himself is not to be identified with 'static' and past. The work of Christ in history could not be reduced to what has been instituted.

[60] Cf. p. 340 in Yves Congar, "Église et monde", *Esprit* 33 (1965).
[61] Ibid.
[62] Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, p. 21.
[63] Ibid., p. 48.
[64] Ibid., p. 52.
[65] Ibid., p. 53
[66] Ibid.

Implications for human-divine cooperation *in the world*

I want to suggest that Congar's overall trajectory can be extended. If emphasis on the historical, dynamic world developed together with the role of the Spirit, this has to be reflected in the 'starting point' of theology.

Congar's earlier work on tradition already goes in this direction. It takes into account *human* historical development and human subject. The 'reality of salvation', faith, is received by an active *subject*;[67] the Word of God creates a *relationship*; the Bible has a dialogical structure. This relationship is in divine and human sacred *history*,[68] where the *divine* embraces a covenant, culminating in Jesus Christ. The sending of the Spirit and the entry of people into this covenant complete the coming of Jesus. It is also a *human* history, providing 'a context for human freedom'. The City of God is built, by power coming out from Jesus Christ as 'conjoined animated instrument' in all the actions God brings about in this world'.[69] The 'visitations', 'missions', 'comings' from above of the kingdom give birth to the church. But the building blocks, which go to form the structure through God's power, come from below. Humans respond, drawing from the deposit of faith, the objective source, and from themselves, the 'living subjective principle, by a movement that comes from God'.[70] The time of the church, the time of the Spirit, and the time of tradition coincide. Tradition is permanent not simply as a structure in successive transmissions of its deposit—the Incarnate Word—but as 'continual renewal and fertility *within* this given structure, which is guaranteed by a living and unchanging principle of identity', in the interrelation of Christ and Spirit.[71]

Congar thus calls the time of the church 'sacramental'.[72] As sacraments refer to the past event, the presence of the Lord and to eternal life, so it is with the time of the church.[73] When truth and power are received by the human being, history is 'constituted by the Holy Spirit's power as properly divine history'.[74] Congar proposes a synthetic view of dynamic tradition, where tradition is a peculiar means of transmission of faith and a liturgy is the perfect expression of this 'sacramental time'.[75] Though the cooperation is evident, the role of the Spirit and human embodied creativity remain restrained. They are viewed only in the context

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[67] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* p. 253.
[68] Ibid., p. 257.
[69] Ibid., pp. 261 ff.
[70] Ibid., p. 263.
[71] Ibid., pp. 266 – 268.
[72] Ibid., p. 259.
[73] On Congar's notion of 'sacramental time', see Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 223 ff.
[74] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 259
[75] Ibid., p. 257.

of the continuing 'identity' of the church, and there is nothing concerning creativity from below. On the other hand, there is a correlation between the move toward human freedom, initiative and the more prominent and proper role of the Spirit.

Is there anything, then, which could reinvigorate the creative potential of human involvement even more? Turning to Fiddes, there is one aspect of participation, which does not have clear analogues in Congar. Fiddes maintains the emphasis on wisdom as embodied in the world and makes it a clear starting point. He thus proposes that attunement to wisdom (and participation in God) has to be 'placed in the context of body and its passions'. Such attunement to wisdom can become 'a deeper participation in God and so in the world itself'.[76] Consequently, Fiddes can contribute to Congar the reciprocal interaction between participation in God and creative participation in the world, where one deepens the other. He exemplifies it with an image of music, which focuses on attunement in body and time. He writes:

> The musical image does not merely 'illustrate' the Trinity: engaging in the rhythms of music is one place where we actually *encounter* the rhythmic movements of the love of God and where talk of the Trinity comes alive. This is, of course, only one place among the signs of the world where we can meet and walk with Lady Wisdom, but it is a peculiarly intense place as it depends on the involvement of persons with their bodily life and the interactions of their bodies.[77]

Fiddes proposes more than mere analogy, which would fall into the trap of participation in God through analogy, mentioned earlier. The embodied existence within the 'signs of the world' is key and essential for participation in God in his proposal. Such embodied and creative participation in the world as the participation in God could provide Congar's theology with a 'starting point' which would integrate creation better. It would provide a reciprocity and real cooperation.

Conclusion

Fiddes approach to wisdom vis-à-vis Congar's theology of mediation and immediacy proposes a possibility of a different point of entry. Biblical wisdom begins with embodied human existence in the world and with human action in the world. This should not be ignored, but rather included and embraced as essential for the participation in God. This will help overcome artificial boundaries between the church and the world and allow viewing the church in the world and the world (as restored) in the church.

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[76] Fiddes, p. 375.
[77] Ibid., pp. 396 ff.

The embodied existence must not be viewed as an external, foreign element, but rather as essential perspective. The change in the approach to the church and world relation would help dismantle the imagery of 'two realms' of the narrative of mediation. However, there should be a place for a spiritual understanding of the mystery of God as already present and accessible in the historic world to the embodied touch of faith. However, this touch need not be restricted to the ecclesial. Human creativity can also participate directly in divine creativity, because the Spirit sustains nature and grace in on-going creation, which is being recapitulated by the first-born of creation, Jesus Christ.

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James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Practice of Communal Discernment and Conflicting Convictions among Mennonite Brethren[1]

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Abstract: This article begins by examining how James Wm. McClendon, Jr. provides a theological and hermeneutical framework (narrative approach, the practices of teaching and Scripture reading, articulation of the baptist vision, and the need for cultural witness) for the church's practice of communal discernment within a baptist ecclesiology. McClendon's description of this practice revolves around two themes: the fellowship of the Spirit and the justification of convictions. The article concludes with an exploration of the implications of McClendon's portrayal of communal discernment for the ongoing journey of Canadian Mennonite Brethren as they seek to navigate cultural changes and the loss of theological consensus within their community regarding the issue of women in ministry leadership.

Keywords: community, hermeneutics, fellowship of the Spirit, justifying convictions, women in ministry leadership

Introduction

In the midst of social and cultural changes, the church often encounters new questions, which simultaneously challenge traditional understanding and raise new opportunities. Over time, varied responses to these new questions can result in the disintegration of a previously shared theology and common practice. While the possibility of consensus may be perceived as a mirage just over the horizon, in reality differences within the church often coalesce quickly around contested assumptions, beliefs, and values. How does the church discern its path when the presence of conflicting convictions permeates the church itself?

My interest in this question arises from within the journey of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, which traces its theological tradition and ethnic roots back to the Radical Reformation and the Dutch Mennonites who followed the early Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons (1496-1561). Already in 1540 some Mennonites began to migrate

[1] This article is a revision of Doug Heidebrecht, 'James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Practice of Communal Discernment and the Presence of Conflicting Convictions among Mennonite Brethren', in *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*, in Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă, and Brian Brock, eds., (Praha/Prague: IBTS, 2007), pp. 47-67, and Douglas James Heidebrecht, *Contextualizing Community Hermeneutics: Mennonite Brethren and Women in Church Leadership*, PhD diss. (University of Wales via IBTS, 2013), pp. 340-368.

from Holland to Prussia and after 250 years of relative religious freedom, several thousand responded to Russia's invitation to relocate to the fertile steppes of present-day southern Ukraine between 1789 and 1806.[2] The Mennonite Brethren organized as a distinct group in 1860 within these Mennonite colonies when a renewed desire to recapture the faith of the Anabaptists converged with a Pietistic concern for an experiential salvation.[3]

Many Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, migrated to North America in three separate waves: first as a response to growing apprehension about shifting Russian policies concerning military service (1874-1880); then following the ensuing chaos of the Communist revolution (1923-1930); and finally during the aftermath of World War II (1947-1952).[4] 'Until 1945, Mennonite Brethren were a fairly homogeneous group, basically held together by their ethnicities, religious beliefs, cultural distinctives, and historic traditions'; nevertheless, this insularity and cohesion quickly dissipated in the face of increased urbanization, industrialization, education, and cultural assimilation.[5] Despite an accelerated acculturation into

[2] The Mennonites in Prussia maintained their original Dutch language for 200 years, and it was only after 1750 that they began to speak the local German language. See Peter Martin Hamm, *Continuity & Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), p. 42. The migration to Russia was primarily due to a growing shortage of available land and changing government policies. For more details see Lawrence Klippenstein, 'The Mennonite Migration to Russia 1786-1806', in John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), pp. 13-42.

[3] Relatively soon after their formation, the Mennonite Brethren encountered the German and Russian Baptists who reinforced their salvation theology, provided this emerging group with a strong church polity, and partnered together in mission. See John B. Toews, 'Baptists and Mennonite Brethren in Russia (1790-1930)', in Paul Toews, ed., *Mennonites & Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), p. 85, 92, and Albert W. Wardin, Jr., 'Mennonite Brethren and Baptists in Russia: Affinities and Dissimilarities', in Toews, *Mennonites & Baptists*, pp. 97-112. For a history of the Mennonite Brethren see P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978); John A. Toews, *The History of the Mennonite Brethren* (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975); and J. B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America, 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993).

[4] Toews, *The History of the Mennonite Brethren*, p. 150. About one-third of the Mennonites in Russia (18,000) chose to immigrate to North America between 1874-1880, and of those, 8,000 immigrated to Canada. The second wave of immigration during the 1920s brought 21,000 Mennonites to Canada, although the significant cultural differences, after being apart for fifty years, created long-lasting tensions between the more conservative but established Canadian Mennonite Brethren (*Kanadier*) and the new immigrants (*Russländer*). 7,700 Mennonites immigrated to Canada from Russia following World War II. See Abe J. Dueck, '*Kanadier*, *Amerikaner* and *Russländer*: Patterns of Fragmentation among North American Mennonite Brethren Churches', *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 19 (2001), p. 181; Ben Doerksen, '*Kanadier* and *Russländer*: Tensions on the Prairies', *Mennonite Historian* 19:2 (1993), pp. 1-2; and Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), pp. 242-247.

[5] Henry J. Schmidt, 'Continuity and Change in an Ethical Tradition: A Case Study of North American Mennonite Brethren Church-State Rhetoric and Practice 1917-1979', PhD diss. (University of Southern California, 1981), pp. 33, 98. Cf. Richard Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century: Ecclesiological Developments', in Paul Toews, ed., *Bridging Troubled Waters: Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995), pp. 193-212; Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 213; and Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), pp. 230-233. Hamm describes three stages: accommodation (1925-1945);

Canadian society during the 1950s and 1960s, the Mennonite Brethren's concurrent resistance to cultural change resulted in a disorientation regarding their own identity.[6] As the cultural isolation of the Mennonite Brethren dissipated, their 'intuitive theology emerging from an experiential emphasis [and] rooted in a strong biblicism' provided little assistance in their attempt to navigate a discriminating path among fundamentalists and evangelicals in North America.[7] The resulting loss of cohesion among Mennonite Brethren was accelerated by the erosion of theological consensus and a growing diversity in social ethics.[8]

This brief portrayal of one denomination's particular journey perhaps illustrates a more common narrative experienced within the larger contemporary church.[9] In the midst of varying geographical locations; self-imposed isolation; spiritual stagnation and renewal; peace and crisis; shifting social surroundings; changing identity; and assimilation within larger

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acculturation (1945-1965); and assimilation (1965-1975).

[6] Richard Kyle observes, 'the history of the Mennonite Brethren in North America is one of progressive acceptance of cultural traits from the wider society on one hand, and a largely unsuccessful resistance to this acculturation on the other'. Richard Kyle, 'The Concept and Practice of Separation from the World in Mennonite Brethren History', *Direction* 13:1, 2 (1984), pp. 37-38. By the end of the 1940s in the United States and the 1950s in Canada the difficult transition from German to English had taken place in most churches. See T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 314 and Gerald C. Ediger, *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940-1970* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001). See also Richard Kyle, 'The Mennonite Brethren and the Denominational Model of the Church: An Adjustment to the Pressures of North American Society', *Mennonite Life* 42:3 (1987), pp. 30-36 and John H. Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987).

[7] Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 180. Cf. Richard Kyle, 'The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism', *Direction* 20:1 (Spring 1991): p. 30; J. B. Toews, 'The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology', *Direction* 10:3 (1981): p. 22; Paul Toews, 'Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America', *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988), p. 46; Bruce L. Guenther, 'Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism Among Mennonites in Canada', in G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 223-240; Katie Funk Wiebe, 'Who? Me? A Fundamentalist?' *Dreamseeker Magazine* 6:4 (2006), pp. 24-29; and Bruce L. Guenther, 'Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Evangelical Anabaptist Identity', in Abe Dueck, Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht, eds., *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011), pp. 47-82. For an analysis of Mennonite Brethren hermeneutics, see Doug Heidebrecht, 'People of the Book: The Significance of Mennonite Brethren Biblicism and Hermeneutics', *Direction* 40:2 (Fall 2011): pp. 219-231.

[8] John E. Toews provides an insightful assessment of the effects of Mennonite Brethren acculturation. See John E. Toews, 'Theological Reflections', *Direction* 14:2 (1985), pp. 60-68. One factor that has also contributed to the rapid acculturation process is the higher rate of urbanization of Mennonite Brethren in comparison to other Mennonite groups in North America. 73% of Mennonite Brethren were urban in 1989. See Leo Driedger, 'From Martyrs to Muppies: The Mennonite Urban Professional Revolution', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57:3 (1993), p. 308. See also Leo Driedger and J. Howard Kauffman, 'Urbanization of Mennonites: Canadian and American Comparisons', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56 (1982), pp. 269-290.

[9] The 37,000 members of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference represent only one of 21 Mennonite Brethren national conferences in 19 countries with a combined membership of 450,000. See 'Introduction', ICOMB: International Community of Mennonite Brethren, http://www.icomb.org/aboutus, accessed March 13, 2015. 'Annual Statistical Survey Report for 2013: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches', in *Gathering 2014: Multiplying for Mission, Yearbook* (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Vancouver, June 11-14, 2014), p. 163.

cultural settings; the church is continually challenged with new questions, which reveal the presence of diverse convictions. For example, is an issue facing Canadian Mennonite Brethren a choice between preserving biblical authority or embracing the values of their cultural setting? Between sustaining an Anabaptist tradition or accepting a generalized evangelical identity? Between valuing theological reflection or engaging in pragmatic mission? How does the church remain faithful in a changing world? How does the church address the presence of conflicting convictions in the midst of social and cultural change?

In light of these questions, James Wm. McClendon, Jr. offers a possible way forward with his portrait of the practice of communal discernment. In this paper, I will explore how McClendon's broader theological approach provides a framework for the church's practice of communal discernment as well as the implications of McClendon's understanding of communal discernment for the ongoing journey of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada.[10]

The Framework for Communal Discernment

McClendon recognizes three historic expressions of what it means to be the church community—catholic, protestant, and baptist—which are incapable of absorbing each other, thus suggesting that 'Christian ecclesiology is provisional ecclesiology'.[11] Each of these ecclesiological types reflects 'a people made up of peoples', which he conceptualizes as being located between the overarching rule or kingdom of God and local assemblies or congregations.[12] McClendon intentionally situates his theological reflection within the broad small 'b' baptist community, which, at times, is also labeled 'Anabaptist', the 'Free Church', or the 'Believers' Church'.[13] McClendon

[10] I will also attempt to integrate McClendon's earlier work on the justification of convictions with his understanding of communal discernment. See James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame, Ill.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). They also published a revised edition of this book: James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge. Pa.: Trinity Press, 1994).

[11] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, *Volume 2* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 344. See page 362 where McClendon notes, 'there is a family relation between Catholic, Protestant, and baptist types; to know the features of one is to know at least some of the features of the others as well'. McClendon's understanding of Christian unity acknowledges, 'each stream of Christian life can express part of the truth of Christ, though none has expressed it all'. Cf. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'The Mennonite and Baptist Vision', in Paul Toews, ed., *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), p. 213.

[12] Ibid., pp. 364, 365. For example, the protestant people would consist of 'sub-peoples', such as Lutherans and Presbyterians. See also p. 370 where McClendon states that denominational bodies 'are not in the present sense churches (not local congregations), nor are they the people they serve, nor (need we add?) are they the kingdom of God. Institutional general bodies are agents of peoplehood and servants of each church'.

[13] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 19. Even though McClendon acknowledges, 'there is no single, distinct body of people' called

offers a multi-faceted theological and hermeneutical framework for the practice of communal discernment from within a baptist ecclesiology, which he shares with the Mennonite Brethren.[14]

Narrative Approach

First, McClendon portrays the practice of communal discernment as an expression of the narrative link between Christology and ecclesiology.[15] He contends, 'there must be a vital link between the Christ we know in worship and the Christ who lived and died and rose: The story now and the story then must be linked by the identity of the one risen Christ Jesus'.[16] This connection draws together an 'emphasis on the Bible and an emphasis on experience' by demonstrating how they are related to one another as an ongoing story.[17] McClendon suggests,

> we participate in this ongoing biblical story, being formed and informed by it (thus narrative generates *character*), discovering the world of the Bible to be our own real world (thus narrative provides a *setting*), and finding its great signs and lesser signs significant as episodes not only of the great story it tells but also of our own stories therein contained (thus narrative issues in *event*).[18]

McClendon's narrative approach insists that propositional theology must 'be in continual and intimate contact with the lived experience' of those who hold Christian beliefs.[19] He claims, 'the truth of faith is made good in

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'baptists', he does provide a list (on page 35) that includes: 'Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ, Mennonites, Plymouth Brethren, Adventists, Russian Evangelicals, perhaps Quakers, certainly black Baptists (who often go by other names), the (Anderson, Indiana) Church of God, Southern and British and European and American Baptists, the Church of the Brethren, perhaps some Methodists, Assemblies of God, assorted intentional communities not organized as churches, missionary affiliates of all the above, and…hundreds of other bodies…'.

[14] Cf. Michael G. Cartwright, 'The Practice and Performance of Scripture: Grounding Christian Ethics in a Communal Hermeneutic', in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 1988* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1988), pp. 31-53 and Michael G. Cartwright, *Practices, Politics, and Performance: Toward a Communal Hermeneutic for Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

[15] Ibid., p. 330.

[16] Ibid., p. 332.

[17] Ibid., p. 38; and McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 461. See also James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'What is a 'baptist' Theology?' *American Baptist Quarterly* 1 (1982): p. 31. Here McClendon recognizes, 'the term "experience" is systemically ambiguous, referring now to evanescent, private, inward feeling, and again to matters of communal and public knowledge. If, however, we see that the experience that matters for Christian life is not mere flashes of affect, but is what we have lived through and lived out in company with one another, the experience that constitutes our share in the Christ story, then the confusion dissolves. Experience in this sense is the enduring or timely aspect of our lives in relation to God and one another; as plot and character, it is the stuff of narrative'.

[18] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 462 (emphasis is McClendon's). See also McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 330, where he notes that narrative includes 'the convergence and interdependence of three related but separable elements: character, social setting, and circumstance'.

[19] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1974), p. 149.

the living of it or not at all; that living is a necessary condition of the justification of Christian belief'.[20] McClendon understands that,

> the content of Christian faith, or for that matter any faith that must be lived out, not just thought out, is best expressed in the shared lives of its believers; without such lives, that faith is dead. These lives in their integrity and compelling power do not just illustrate, but test and verify (or by their absence or failure falsify) the set of religious convictions that they embody.[21]

McClendon defines a conviction as 'a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before'.[22] These convictions are 'bound together in a living or organic unity', which is prior to any theological description or analysis 'because without Christian life, the doctrine is dead; without Christian doctrine, the life is formless'.[23] McClendon observes,

> the convictions that make such a common life possible fall into three broad, overlapping categories, those that inform Christian living *(moral* convictions), those that display the substance of Christian faith *(doctrinal* convictions), and those that open out into a Christian vision or worldview *(philosophical* convictions).[24]

McClendon's narrative understanding of the church implies that the 'shape of the common life in the body of Christ' is both the context and character of theological reflection.[25] He defines theology as 'the discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another *and to whatever else there is*'.[26] The subject of theology is the convictions of a community; that is, the shared persuasions and beliefs that guide the community's thought and shapes it life, and thus, theology cannot be extracted from the involvement of the church in the process of 'doing' theology.[27]

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[20] Ibid., p. viii.

[21] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 110-111. McClendon concludes, 'theology must be at least biography'. See McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 22. For a reflection on McClendon's approach of biography as theology see, David Nelson Duke, 'Theology and Biography: Simple Suggestions for a Promising Field', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13:2 (1986), pp. 137-149.

[22] See McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 5.

[23] McClendon, 'What is a 'baptist' Theology?' p. 37; McClendon, 'Preface', *Doctrine*, p. 7. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, 'Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning', in Parushev, Creangă, and Brock, *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*, pp. 27-45.

[24] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 21 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[25] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 45.

[26] Ibid., p. 23 (emphasis is McClendon's). Thomas N. Finger incorporates McClendon's understanding of convictional theology in his portrayal of Anabaptist theology. See *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 4, Location 994-1004.

[27] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. rev. and enl. ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 27. Willie James Jennings contends that the communal nature of convictions

The Practices of Teaching and Reading Scripture

Second, McClendon's narrative ecclesiology provides the context for understanding the formation and maintenance of practices, including the practice of communal discernment, which give social shape to the church.[28] Following Alasdair MacIntyre, McClendon uses the model of games to describe practices as 'complex series of human actions involving definite practitioners who by these means and in accordance with these rules together seek the intended end'.[29] Practices within a particular narrative context also evoke common virtues ('excellencies or skills') that will 'sustain and enhance them'.[30]

McClendon views Christianity as 'a set of powerful *practices* that embody the life-forming convictions of its practitioners', and through which the presence of the risen Christ is known.[31] Common practices of the church include worship, mission (or witness), reading Scripture, and community formation, with its embedded practices (or remembering signs) of baptism and the Lord's Supper.[32] Without these communal practices, McClendon argues, 'Christianity *dis*-integrates, that is, loses its integrity'.[33]

McClendon draws a clear connection between the church's teaching and its practices: 'in the broadest sense, the church teaches by what it is and by what it does. All its practices interact with its teaching. When other practices are faithful and whole, teaching is obedient and pure; when they are corrupt, teaching is corrupt as well'.[34] Christian doctrine is 'a church teaching as she must teach if she is to be the church here and now' for 'there is no 'thing taught' without *teaching*; no Christian doctrines apart from the

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'serves as important background to grasping the theological method' used by McClendon. See 'Recovering the Radical Reformation for Baptist Theology: An Assessment of James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s *Doctrine*', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24:2 (1997), p. 182.

[28] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 218, 187. See pages 171-172 where McClendon affirms, 'what *is* indispensable for making any society (or culture or community) *one* society is that it shall have a narrative tradition whose function is to provide a setting for the several practices of that society, a web that unites them in a single meaning' (emphasis is McClendon's).

[29] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 28. See McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 162-166 for McClendon's description of the concept of games. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ill.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 175. For a brief discussion of the practice of communal discernment in relation to MacIntyre's approach, see Nancey Murphy, 'Using MacIntyre's Method in Christian Ethics', in Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 37-38. For a discussion of practices in the church, see Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, 'A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices', in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 13-32.

[30] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 104, 170.

[31] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 240, 244. 421, 422 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[32] Ibid., pp. 374, 424; and McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 218.

[33] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 424 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[34] Ibid., p. 34.

practice of doctrine'.[35] This practice of doctrine involves disciples of Christ (participants) engaging in sound teaching (means) by following the rules of the practice in order to achieve a corporate maturity in Christ (end).[36] Thus, McClendon concludes, 'both doctrine and structure—both the practice of teaching and the community that practices it'—are inseparable.[37]

Integral to the practice of teaching is the church's practice of Scripture reading. McClendon affirms, 'the Bible is for us the word of God written; it is that text in which the One who lays claim to our lives by the act of his life makes that claim afresh in acts of speech; it is for us God speaking; it is the word of God'.[38] The central task of the practice of Bible reading is to engage with the 'identity of Jesus Christ and (through that) to the identities of God and God's people'.[39] The church must participate in reading Scripture as a community of readers 'who face the interpretive task from a shared context of witness in a particular place'.[40] While the study of Scripture provides an 'objective' basis for the church's teaching, it is also here that the church encounters God's Spirit who 'challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves'.[41]

The church's reading of Scripture must proceed according to the recognized rules of the practice.[42] Lower-level rules, as practice-constitutive rules, are 'reading guides. . . based on such matters as vocabulary, grammar, and historical-critical reading', which, if not followed, simply indicate that the reader is not engaged appropriately in the practice of reading.[43] Upper-level rules represent reading strategies that 'are coherent with the deep and widely shared convictions of the reading community', such as the affirmation of the plain sense of Scripture, as has been acknowledged by the church over the centuries.[44] McClendon notes how the 'strong link between the plain sense of the Scripture and the church's self-understanding' functions to reinforce its identification with the biblical story'.[45] A Christocentric approach, which insists 'the Bible is the book of Jesus Christ, a book that is about him, a book that finds its interpretive key

[35] Ibid., pp. 24, 29 (emphasis is McClendon's).
[36] Ibid., pp. 29-33. See p. 31 where McClendon notes, 'in Christian teaching as in other practices to know the rules is necessary, but to play the game is something more'.
[37] Ibid., 43.
[38] Ibid., p. 464. McClendon, nevertheless, does not advocate a flat reading of Scripture that simply affirms 'the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible' (p. 25).
[39] Ibid., p. 40.
[40] Ibid., p. 41.
[41] Ibid., pp. 36-41.
[42] Ibid., p. 37.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., pp. 36, 38. McClendon notes the 'strong link between the plain sense of the Scripture and the church's self-understanding as a continuation of the biblical story' (p. 44).
[45] Ibid., p. 44.

in him', reflects a second upper level rule.[46] A third upper-level rule McClendon identifies is the unity and congruence of the Bible, which affirms the continuity of the gospel story through both the Old and New Testaments.[47]

McClendon recognizes that Christians are also interested in identifying the spiritual sense of the biblical text, which should not be seen as an abandonment of the plain sense, but rather as the appropriation of the whole story to readers' lives.[48] The spiritual sense is another way of referring to the point of the text or its application.[49] McClendon admits, however, it is often 'when Christians set out to *apply* the biblical story, their apparent unity splinters'; resulting in contested readings of Scripture, which may reveal the absence of a shared hermeneutic that effectively bridges the biblical text with the experience of the church.[50] Therefore, because both reading Scripture and experience 'require assessment, interpretation, and judgment,' another practice by the church—communal discernment—is needed.[51]

The baptist Vision

Third, McClendon realizes that with all the diversity (and disunity) among baptist groups, they have failed to see their guiding vision within 'their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, [and] their own communal practices and patterns'.[52] He proposes a 'baptist' vision, which can serve both as 'the touchstone by which authentic baptist life is discovered and described, and also as the organizing principle around which a genuine baptist theology can take shape'.[53] McClendon calls it a 'vision' to denote a

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[46] Ibid., pp. 37, 463.

[47] Ibid., p. 38. See p. 463 where McClendon asserts that the New Testament is to be seen as the 'fulfillment, not simply enlargement, of the Old' and that the two Testaments need to be read in 'ascending order of authority'.

[48] Ibid., p. 36.

[49] Ibid., pp. 37, 44.

[50] Ibid., p. 45 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[51] Ibid., p. 477. See p. 479 where McClendon defines communal discernment as 'a communal undertaking in which God's people in a certain place meet and consider their next steps in the common life, bringing their shared journey under mutual study in the light of all the Scripture and all experience, committing it to ultimate authority in earnest prayer, and shaping the common judgment of all concerned'.

[52] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 26.

[53] Ibid., p. 28. McClendon suggests a brief set of core convictions that typically characterise the baptist people. These features include: biblicism (defined as 'humble acceptance of the authority of Scripture for both faith and practice'), mission (seen as the 'responsibility to witness to Christ—and accept the suffering witness entails'), liberty (described as the 'freedom to respond to God without the intervention of the state or other powers'), discipleship (understood as 'life transformed into service by the lordship of Jesus Christ'), and community (characterized by 'sharing together in a storied life of obedient service to and with Christ'). See also McClendon, 'What is a 'baptist' Theology?' pp. 23-25; McClendon, 'The Mennonite and Baptist Vision', pp. 215-216; and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'The Believers Church in Theological Perspective', in Stanley Hauerwas et al., , eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 320-322. While McClendon observes that several of these characteristics have been suggested as organizing principles for the baptist movement, none on their

'way of seeing', which is able to provide a guiding stimulus that can shape the life and thought of baptist people.[54]

McClendon locates the baptist vision in the hermeneutical strategy of the early Christian community where this approach was 'not *a* way to read Scripture; it was for them *the* way'.[55] McClendon uses Acts 2:16 as a key illustration of this reading strategy where Peter's use of 'this is that' becomes the way to make sense of the present Pentecost experience ('this') in light of what the prophet Joel had said in the fourth century B.C.E. ('that').[56] The significance of Peter's connection with the prophet Joel is not that 'the disciples in Jerusalem had unaccountably traveled backward to Joel's day', but rather that his prophecy, 'though revealed (and fully relevant) long before, was a key or frame for *interpreting* the present situation of the disciples'.[57]

The motif, 'this is that', calls the present church to see itself in the narrative 'frame of the New Testament church' where the 'context of self-interpretation' is the early Christian community attested to in Scripture.[58] The baptist vision shows 'how the narrative the Bible reflects, the story of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church, is related to the narrative we ourselves live', thereby joining the present church's experience to the Scriptures.[59] With a second motif, 'then is now', the church also looks forward to see itself in the frame of biblical expectation, so that 'the church that must give final answer only to Jesus the Lord, is already present—it is the church today'.[60] The 'identity of the one risen Christ Jesus' provides the narrative link between 'the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community'.[61]

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own are able to provide a governing vision that would embrace them all. See McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 29.

[54] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'Primitive, Present, Future: A Vision for the Church in the Modern World', in Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 101; and McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 27.

[55] McClendon, 'Primitive, Present, Future', 100 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[56] Ibid., p. 102. For a similar understanding of the motto 'this is that', see Loveday Alexander, ''This is That': The Authority of Scripture in the Acts of the Apostles', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (2004), pp. 188-204.

[57] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 408 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[58] Ibid., p. 343.

[59] McClendon, 'What is a 'baptist' Theology?' p. 30. McClendon locates the baptist vision in the hermeneutical strategy of the early Christian community where this approach was 'not a way to read Scripture; it was for them the way'. See McClendon, 'Primitive, Present, Future', p. 100 (emphasis is McClendon's).

[60] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 344. See p. 466 where McClendon asserts, 'the church of the New Testament is the church now; time, though not abolished, is in this manner transcended, and the church that reclaims its past stands today before the great final Judge as well'.

[61] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 31, 332. Nevertheless, McClendon argues that this is 'not mere replication of primitive Christian behavior', where 'one may mistakenly suppose that Christianity envisions just such an escape from the present into the past, a return to biblical or past Christian events and circumstances'. See McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 395, 408.

McClendon's characterization of the baptist vision as a 'distinctive reading strategy' essentially recognizes (albeit implicitly for McClendon) this vision as another upper-level rule guiding the church's practice of Scripture reading.[62] The baptist vision thus acts as an 'interpretive link between the plain sense of Scripture and its spiritual sense', by demonstrating how the biblical narrative relates to the ongoing story of the church's journey of faith.[63] As a hermeneutical motto, the baptist vision also suggests that 'how the church interprets the Bible is strongly linked to the way the church interprets itself'.[64] Since the Bible and the church are 'one story, one reality'; the church must act in its own context with the understanding that what it does is formed by its identity with Jesus' first disciples.[65]

McClendon acknowledges that while 'not every reading of Scripture is a baptist reading', the baptist vision is still 'a distinctive reading strategy, exemplified in Scripture that has the capacity to give a particular shape to the life of the people of God'.[66] Therefore, a baptist theology will seek to employ this 'very strategy as a guiding hermeneutic for the discovery, understanding, and—God willing—creative transformation of the convictions of a people who are themselves so guided, so shaped'.[67] McClendon's baptist vision anticipates the active engagement of the church in discerning how to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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[62] McClendon, 'The Mennonite and Baptist Vision', p. 217. For further elaboration on baptist vision as a hermeneutical strategy, see Parush R. Parushev, 'Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics', Helen Dare and Simon Woodman, eds., *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2011), pp. 172-190 and Ian Birch, 'Baptists and Biblical Interpretation: Reading the Bible with Christ', in Dare and Woodman, *The Plainly Revealed Word of God*, pp. 153-171.

[63] McClendon, *Doctrine,* pp. 36, 38, 45, 461. See also McClendon, 'What is a 'baptist' Theology?' p. 31. The baptist vision's ability to relate Scripture to the experience of the church is comparable to Richard Hay's hermeneutical task. See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 207.

[64] Ibid., p. 44. Barry Harvey concludes, 'one way of parsing this complex relationship between past, present and future is to say that the church does not simply have a hermeneutic for interpreting world and Bible, but that it *is* that hermeneutic'. See Barry Harvey, 'Doctrinally Speaking: James McClendon on the Nature of Doctrine', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27:1 (2000), p. 255. Nancey Murphy proposes that the baptist vision is the 'missing piece of the contemporary hermeneutic problem'. Such a vision enables the contemporary church community to get the point of the biblical speech acts because it understands itself to be addressed by the texts and it is 'in some sense *the same interpretive community* as that of the writer'. See Nancey Murphy, 'Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision', in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 264, 270 (emphasis is Murphy's).

[65] Ibid., pp. 44, 395. For examples of how McClendon applies this approach within the context of the church, see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Making Gospel Sense to a Troubled Church* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1995).

[66] McClendon, 'The Mennonite and Baptist Vision', p. 222.

[67] Ibid.

Cultural Witness

Finally, McClendon contends that the church 'must in its many locations embody the gospel' and through its practices provide an alternative social ethic.[68] He acknowledges the church often internalizes both cultural and Christian stories—'Christians face an interior struggle, inasmuch as the line between church and world passes right through each Christian heart', which necessitates understanding this mixed cultural setting in order to assess the church's presence and work in a particular time and place.[69] Because McClendon recognizes 'the church at some given times and places…is or is not itself fitly in step with the gospel of the kingdom', he seeks to understand the 'relation between the culture that is the church…and those cultures the church indwells, evangelizes, serves'.[70] McClendon defines 'culture' broadly as the 'set of meaningful practices, dominant attitudes, and characteristic ways of doing things that typify a community (or a society or a civilization)'.[71]

McClendon proposes that for the church 'to identify and address culture at a given time and place, Christian theology must rediscover Christianity then and there, must discover itself afresh'.[72] Rather than ignoring the cultural context in which the church is embedded, he advocates including the cultural dimension in the understanding and justification of its own convictions.[73] This entails a rethinking of Christian identity, which seeks 'continuity with Jesus and his disciples…by repetition of the original in the current generation' (the baptist vision).[74]

Because Christian convicions are often contested within any larger cultural setting, McClendon proposes an approach called perspectivism, which does not assume that convictional differences are 'necessarily the result of mistakes or character flaws' nor views these differences as insurmountable.[75] Rather, perspectivism 'makes room for rival truth-claims' with its affirmation that 'persons or communities with different convictions will experience, think, and speak about their worlds differently'.[76] However, while perspectivism 'regards convictional conflict as expected', it does not

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[68] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Witness: Systematic Theology*, *Volume* 3 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 45. The church's witness within its cultural context must engage people in the story of the gospel with an invitation to enter into that story as disciples (pp. 356-357).
[69] Ibid., pp. 363, 60 and McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 17.
[70] McClendon, *Witness*, pp. 36, 34.
[71] Ibid., p. 50.
[72] Ibid., p. 310
[73] Ibid..
[74] Ibid., p. 330.
[75] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 330 and McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 9.
[76] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 54 and McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 9. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, 'Convictional Perspectivism: A Constructive Proposal for a Theological Response to Postmodern Conditions', in John Currie and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by Andrew Kirk* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 111-124.

assume 'there is no truth that is true'.[77] This stands in contrast to relativism, which affirms that 'interconvictional persuasion is impossible' because it holds that convictions 'are all relative to the culture we inhabit, so that what is worthy or justifiable or true or meaningful varies from culture to culture'.[78] McClendon suggests that 'whenever disciples constitute themselves as a witnessing people', they must be involved in reflection and discernment in order to connect their faith journey with the church's 'shared witness to the outside world'.[79]

The Practice of Communal Discernment

McClendon's narrative approach, portrayal of teaching and Scripture reading practices in the church, articulation of the baptist vision, and interest in cultural engagement offers a rich theological and hermeneutical framework for the practice of communal discernment. McClendon's description of this practice revolves around two themes: the fellowship of the Spirit and the justification of convictions.

The Fellowship of the Spirit

McClendon identifies the presence of the Spirit within the gathered church as a criterial authority for faith and life 'that is possessed by members of the Christian body just because they *are* members'.[80] McClendon proposes that 'the fellowship of the Spirit implies a *common life* whose practices suit, not this present age, but the age to come'.[81] The authority of the fellowship of the Spirit 'comes into its own only as the community communes, only as it walks and talks together and finds its own voice by listening to its constituent voices'.[82] Thus, the practice of communal discernment emerges as,

> a communal undertaking in which God's people in a certain place meet and consider their next steps in the common life, bringing their shared journey under mutual study in the light of all the Scripture and all experience, committing it to ultimate authority in earnest prayer, and shaping the common judgment of all concerned.[83]

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[77] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 9 and McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 350.
[78] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 8 and McClendon, *Witness*, 50. McClendon critiques relativism because it attempts 'to occupy a standpoint ("the view from nowhere") from which it can survey all possible standpoints and find them all "relative", while at the same time it claims that there is no such standpoint'. See McClendon, *Witness*, p. 52 where he views relativism's assertions as self-contradictory because the relativist either says: 'All claims are cultural-context-dependent, including this one'; or 'All claims are cultural-context-dependent, except for this one'. Cf. McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 350.
[79] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), pp. 210-211.
[80] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 480 (emphasis is McClendon's).
[81] Ibid., p. 366 (emphasis is McClendon's).
[82] Ibid., p. 480. For an extended explanation of 'criterial authority', see pp. 457-458.
[83] Ibid., p. 479.

It is the presence of the Spirit indwelling the community, not values such as effectiveness or convenience, which justifies the practice of communal discernment.[84]

Communal discernment involves the community of readers who 'are corporately engaged in placing Jesus Christ at the center of Scripture in such a way that the prophetic [or baptist] vision becomes the present vision of the community'.[85] McClendon locates the practice of communal discernment in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18, the setting apart of missionaries in Acts 13, and the gathering of the early church as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 and 12-14.[86]

Communal discernment represents a practice along the journey of Christian existence, which at times may address the issues of sin and fault through reconciliation within the church or it may seek to recognize and acknowledge the gifts of men and women for service.[87] Communal discernment is also expressed through the common reading of Scripture by an assembly of disciples, because both experience and Scripture 'require assessment, interpretation, and judgment'.[88] The teaching of the church is also a 'practice of a community of readers. . . who meet and work together, readers who face the interpretive task from a shared context of witness in a particular place'.[89] As McClendon acknowledges, 'both doctrine and structure—both the practice of teaching and the community that practices it'—are inseparable.[90]

McClendon recognizes that 'such discernment is not a special revelation or disclosure that forecloses the thinking minds of those who share' but rather represents a 'never-ending congregational *conversation*'.[91] Discernment is not 'a mechanical democracy of yes or no

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[84] Ibid. Shared discernment is essentially 'a gift, a mode of God's presence as Holy Spirit' (p. 478).
[85] Ibid.
[86] See McClendon, 'The Believers Church in Theological Perspective', p. 321; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality' in Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman, eds., *Ties that Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), p. 27; McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 223; McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 479; and McClendon, *Witness*, p. 379. For a more complete list of biblical texts reflecting the practice of communal discernment see McClendon, 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality', pp. 30-31. See also James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and John Howard Yoder, 'Christian Identity in Ecumenical Perspective: A Response to David Wayne Layman', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27 (1990), p. 578. McClendon suggests that Yoder's vision of a hermeneutic community is often a missing strand in contemporary ethical programmes. See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., 'Evangelical Ethics: A Review Article', *The Modern Churchman* 29:4 (1987), p. 47.
[87] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 143, 144, 145 and McClendon, 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality', p. 26. While McClendon notes that 'Anabaptist Christians restored the task of discernment to the community', it often was regulated to the exercise of discipline in response to sin. Nevertheless, McClendon links communal discernment with the practice of 'Christian soaring', for its ability to identify model discipleship.
[88] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 41, 142, 477.
[89] Ibid., p. 41.
[90] Ibid., p. 43.
[91] Ibid., p. 478 and McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 223 (emphasis is McClendon's).

votes' nor is it 'a mere opinion poll of the church membership'.[92] Instead, McClendon suggests that discernment lies 'in the mutual trust of brothers and sisters who can and will assemble; it lies in a diversity of gifts, of which leadership is one while discernment of spirits is another; it lies in listening to concerned outsiders; it lies in obedience to the Spirit'.[93] Different voices within the community must not be silenced, because this will diminish both the quality of dialogue as well as limit future understanding.[94]

McClendon maintains that since scholarly experts and designated leaders are usually recognized as authorities in the church's discernment process, a proper assessment of their authority in relation to the fellowship of the Spirit is needed. He suggests that the criterial authority of the community differs from the authority of the solitary expert or designated leader in the church.[95] In the practice of communal discernment, both church leaders ('authorities in' the congregation) and theologians ('authorities on' the Bible) need to see themselves as members and participants in the assembly of disciples.[96] While the Christian church through the centuries has acknowledged the authority of its 'prophets, gifted leaders, apostles, pastors, teachers [and] theologians', the New Testament narrative reflects 'a company of equals, equally gifted by God's Spirit, equally responsible for the community-building whose accomplishment is the fullness of Christ'.[97] The church that exalts the gifts of a few (clergy) by creating a 'passive, second-rank Christian class' (laity) misses the New Testament call to set apart a people, where 'every member is a minister'.[98]

Along these lines, McClendon distinguishes between primary theology, where the church engages in Scripture reading, discernment, and teaching; and secondary theology, which entails 'critically monitoring, examining, and revising that teaching'.[99] He contends that scholars must

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[92] McClendon, 'The Concept of Authority', p. 106.
[93] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 479.
[94] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 339.
[95] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 480. For a discussion of McClendon's view of the authority of leaders in the church, see Doug Heidebrecht, 'Preacher, Teacher, Pastor, and Elder as Authorities in the Church: McClendon's Portrayal of God's Authority and Canadian Mennonite Brethren', *Baptistic Theologies* 6:2 (Autumn 2014): pp. 24-42.
[96] Ibid. McClendon recognizes that the self-involving nature of theology requires that 'one's own story may not be disconnected from the common story; the theologian's proposals require testing at every stage by participation in the common life'. See McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 40.
[97] Ibid., pp. 478, 369.
[98] Ibid., pp. 369, 370.
[99] McClendon, *Witness*, pp. 328, 339 and McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 33, 24. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, 'Carrying out the Theological Task in a Baptistic Way', *Baptistic Theologies* 6:1 (Spring 2014), pp. 53-71; Parush R. Parushev, 'Theologie op een baptistenmanier' [Doing Theology in a Baptist Way], in Teun van der Leer, ed., *Zo zijn onze manieren! In Gesprek over gemeentetheologie*, Baptistica Reeks, vol.1 (Barneveld, Nederland: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, September 2009, in Dutch), pp. 7-22 and 66-75, and Nigel G. Wright, 'Theology in the Service of the Church', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 2:1 (September 2001): pp. 33-38. David H. Kelsey also makes the distinction between primary and

presuppose and 'merge into the primary church practice' they are supporting.[100] McClendon recognizes that the self-involving nature of theology requires that 'one's own story may not be disconnected from the common story; the theologian's proposals require testing at every stage by participation in the common life'.[101] Similarly, McClendon observes, 'the prophet judges the community, but the community also judges whether the prophet is true or false; each in a sense exercises some authority over the other'.[102]

Primary and secondary theologies are interdependent, for 'without a community that lives to enact it, the Bible cannot convey its full message'.[103] At the same time, the 'drive to truth and truthfulness in Christian convictions' within the church requires the assistance of theological reflection and challenge.[104] However, understanding the practice of communal discernment as the fellowship of the Spirit, prioritizes the authority of the gathered community where all are free to participate in the conversation of primary theology.

Justifying Convictions in Community

McClendon affirms that while the community is 'the most important unit in assessing belief and establishing knowledge claims', in a pluralistic world it is not enough simply to 'establish that a belief is supported by the practices and convictions of one's community'.[105] This implies that the church, in the practice of communal discernment encounters various convictions *within* the community itself that reflect the influence of overlapping convictional communities beyond the church.[106] These convictions are persistent enough to have the capacity to endure in the face of difficulties by exercising 'a dominant or controlling role over a number of other beliefs'.[107] The interaction of these diverse convictional communities highlights the complexity of the task of justifying convictions within a pluralistic cultural context since one's convictions 'not only guide us but identify us and make us what we are'.[108]

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secondary theology. See *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 19-22 and Paul Duane Matheny, *Contextual Theology: The Drama of Our Times* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 44, 77.

[100] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 48.

[101] McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 40.

[102] McClendon, 'The Concept of Authority', p. 106.

[103] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 46.

[104] Ibid., p. 47.

[105] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 12.

[106] Ibid., p. 92 (emphasis is the author's).

[107] Ibid., p. 87.

[108] Ibid., pp. 5, 17. See p. 9 where they recognize that convictional conflict is expected but not inevitable. Convictions are persistent enough to have the capacity to face difficulties and they play a significant role in the lives of their holders by exercising 'a dominant or controlling role over a number of other beliefs' (p. 87).

McClendon, along with James Smith, acknowledges, 'we inhabit [multiple] forms of life that are not based on evidence, forms that constitute the *framework* of our thinking', and which reflect ways of 'embodying assumptions and ways of reasoning'.[109] These different frameworks often escape the notice of those involved because their conventions rest 'beneath the level of explanation, yet [are] quietly determinative of how the language is understood'.[110] All the convictions expressed by either an individual or community form a shared conviction set, so that 'the justification or rejection of convictions…must often consist in the justification or rejection of *sets* of convictions, of conviction sets, that will stand or fall in interdependence and not one by one'.[111] McClendon recognizes that 'the justification of any one conviction is not likely to be achieved without regarding its relation to other convictions embraced by the same community or the same believer'.[112] He observes that the unity of these conviction sets is seldom based on deductive systems but rather reflects their mutual relation to the life of a person or community expressed in 'rough but vital' shared experiences.[113] In other words, 'the narrative of the convictional community is the glue that binds its convictions into one set'.[114]

McClendon recognizes that 'the acquiring of a conviction set and the justification of the set are often simultaneous and always interrelated—not to be understood apart from one another'.[115] He is aware that the choice and justification of one's convictions entails a complex historical process, where many choices are 'made over a period of time, reinforcing one another, accumulating, developing in more and more definite directions until we find ourselves with a conviction set we acknowledge as our own, as being the way of life, the outlook, that we have chosen'.[116] Therefore, 'the question of justification must attend both to the varied character of the convictions themselves and to the variety of the involved relationships between convictions'.[117]

Since convictions or beliefs are expressed in what individuals and communities actually say and do, McClendon endeavors to 'set down the

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[109] Ibid., p. 22 (emphasis is McClendon and Smith's).
[110] Ibid., p. 23. McClendon and Smith note that 'we do not need to have…[the frameworks] 'grounded' or proved to us; we follow them without additional reflection, without noticing that we are doing so'. McClendon affirms, 'there are no theory-free facts, no convictionless facts, no facts save those constitutive of one story or another'. See McClendon, *Witness*, p. 363.
[111] Ibid., pp. 91, 99 (emphasis is McClendon and Smith's). They acknowledge that 'different assessments of these connections reflect different conceptual schemes' or conviction sets, thereby revealing the profound convictional nature of any rational attempt at justification (pp. 124, 131).
[112] Ibid., p. 91.
[113] Ibid., p. 99.
[114] Ibid., p. 176.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., pp. 169, 178.
[117] Ibid., p. 97.

'rules' by which the best convictions must prevail'.[118] He proposes three approaches that may justify a community's convictions.[119] First, an analysis of language, which both divides and joins individuals and communities, allows for a correlation between the justification of convictions and the happiness of speech-acts.[120] Second, justification may emerge when 'widely accepted considerations that go to establishing the adequacy of any belief', such as truth, consistency, rationality, or righteousness, are considered.[121] A third element is the function of a social matrix, which provides an occasion for the justification of convictions in the face of challenges due to changing times and circumstances. Justification may occur when the community seeks 'to discover and show how their original convictions were related to their other convictions' and to whatever they knew to be the case about the world.[122] Understanding the criteria for justifying convictions within the context of conflicting convictions provides a way to assess convictional claims and move toward a shared conviction set.

Interconvictional encounters and the presence of conflicting convictions can often create dissonance within the same individual or community.[123] The process of justification takes place within a wider pluralistic context where the presence of conflicting convictions may actually deny the convictions in question.[124] McClendon suggests that while a community (or individual) may 'vacillate between choices for a time, trying in some way to reconcile them' or may attempt to isolate conflicting sets, eventually 'conflicts between convictions cannot be disguised or ignored'.[125] He observes, 'a prime element in a fruitful encounter must be the location of actual belief differences' since the 'logic of disagreement is an indispensable clue to the logic of agreement'.[126] Justification can occur as the community seeks to demonstrate 'how their original convictions were related to their other convictions' and to whatever they knew to be the case about the world.[127]

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[118] Ibid., p. 16. See page 185 where McClendon and Smith use the term 'theoretics' to refer to the 'investigation and transformation of the shared conviction sets of convictional communities'.
[119] For an application of McClendon and Smith's process for justifying convictions to narrative theology, see Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), pp. 194-240.
[120] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, pp. 107, 108. They propose, following the work of John L. Austin (1911-1960), that 'the conditions for the happy utterance of a speech-act are also the conditions under which the belief(s) expressed by that speech-act are justifiable' (p. 82).
[121] Ibid., pp. 106-195, 154, 176. See also McClendon, *Witness*, p. 298.
[122] Ibid., p. 168.
[123] Ibid., p. 165.
[124] Ibid., pp. 168, 173.
[125] Ibid., p. 166.
[126] Ibid., pp. 166, 167.
[127] Ibid., p. 168.

The practice of communal discernment by the church must be contextualized within the larger cultural setting in order to understand the mixed nature of the church's convictions. Therefore, McClendon advocates the principle of fallibility, which 'holds that even one's most cherished and tenaciously held convictions might be false and are in principle always subject to rejection, reformulation, improvement, or reformation'.[128] He acknowledges, on one hand, 'we cannot do without convictions, fallible though we are', and on the other hand, 'we cannot avoid error, convinced though we may be'.[129] McClendon recognizes, 'conviction sets without the fallibility principle are blind; the fallibility principle without other convictions is empty'.[130]

Implications for Mennonite Brethren

As one engaged in secondary theology, McClendon presents a cohesive framework that demonstrates how communal discernment reflects an inherent practice of baptistic communities. McClendon advocates for a practice of communal discernment, centered on the baptist vision and located within both the narrative and the practices of the church, which calls the church to function as a fellowship of the Spirit that seeks to justify its convctions within the wider cultural context. Can McClendon's practice of communal discernment offer a way forward for Mennonite Brethren as they seek to navigate cultural changes and the loss of theological consensus within their community?

A particular example of where McClendon's practice of communal discernment can be applied is in regards to the Canadian Mennonite Brethren struggle over the issue of women in ministry leadership. Mennonite Brethren became acutely aware of the presence of conflicting convictions among themselves when their traditional stance restricting women from public roles in the church was challenged during the 1970s.[131] What had not even been a question for the first one hundred years of Mennonite Brethren history, now emerged as a very divisive debate. Mennonite Brethren were totally unprepared for the cultural upheaval that swept across the United States and Canada during the 1960s, in particular, the feminist movement, which first emerged as a women's rights movement and then spontaneously erupted as

[128] Ibid., p. 112. For further reflection on the significance of the principle of fallibility, see McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 45; and McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 472.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] See Allen R. Guenther and Herbert Swartz, 'The Role of Women in the Church', *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 12:9 (4 May 1973), pp. 4-9. The articles and letters to the editor that follow the publication of this article reveal the intensity of this debate.

a wide-spread women's liberation movement.[132] Over the next forty years, Mennonite Brethren attempted to respond to the ensuing questions about the role of women in the church through four study conferences and in eight resolutions.[133] Despite these attempts, Mennonite Brethren churches continue to reflect the existence of contested convictions regarding women in ministry leadership.[134] In the latest resolution, Canadian Mennonite Brethren decided 'to bless each member church in its own discernment of Scripture, conviction and practice' in relation to women's involvement in the church, while acknowledging their inability to achieve consensus and affirming the need for continuing congregational discernment.[135]

McClendon's practice of communal discernment offers several challenges for Mennonite Brethren as they continue on this journey together. First, McClendon's proposal of a baptist vision challenges Mennonite Brethren, as a member of the broader baptist community, to recognize the need for an integrative vision that offers both a narrative framework and an organizing hermeneutical center. Historically, Mennonite Brethren would have resonated with McClendon's baptist vision; however, as they have

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[132] Betty Friedan's publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963) is representative of the emergence feminism during the 1960s. For helpful introductions to this second wave of feminism, see Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981); Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Signs* 14:1 (1988): pp. 119-157; Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); and Naomi Black, 'The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave', in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney, eds., *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 80-102.

[133] The study conferences took place in 1974, 1980, 1989, and 2004-05. The resolutions were developed in 1975, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1999, and 2006. Reflections regarding the role of Mennonite Brethren women in the church during this time include: Saundra Plett, 'Attitudes Toward Women as Reflected in Mennonite Brethren Periodicals', *Direction* 9:1 (January 1980): pp. 13-24; Katie Funk Wiebe, 'Mennonite Brethren Women: Images and Realities of the Early Years', *Mennonite Life* 36:3 (1981): pp. 22-28; Gloria Neufeld Redekop, 'The Understanding of Woman's Place Among Mennonite Brethren in Canada: A Question of Biblical Interpretation', *Conrad Grebel Review* 8:3 (1990): pp. 259-274; Katie Funk Wiebe, 'Women in the Mennonite Brethren Church', in John E. Toews, Valerie Rempel and Katie Funk Wiebe, eds., *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1992), pp. 173-189; Kae Rempel Neufeld, 'Caught by the Fence: Challenges Facing Women in Ministry Leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church' (DMin project, St. Stephen's College, 2010), pp. 15-56; Doug Heidebrecht, 'Women among Canadian Mennonite Brethren and the Struggle for Denominational Consensus', in Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop, eds., *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), pp. 85-104; Doug Heidebrecht, 'Authoritative Mennonite Brethren: The Convergence of Church Polity, Ordination, and Women in Leadership', *Baptistic Theologies* 3:1 (Spring 2011), pp. 59-75; and Heidebrecht, 'Contextualizing Community Hermeneutics'.

[134] A 2004 survey of Canadian Mennonite Brethren indicated that 49% agree with the statement, 'qualified women should be permitted to fill any ministry role, including that of senior pastor'. 36% disagree with this statement and only 10% are ambivalent. See Dora Dueck, 'Survey Results Indicate Enthusiasm for MB Denomination', *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 18, 2005, p. 16.

[135] See 'Board of Faith and Life Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution', *Mennonite Brethren Herald,* February 24, 2006, p. 15, and Dora Dueck, 'In the Circle: BFL Resolution Passes with 77%', *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, August 11, 2006, pp. 10-11.

acculturated within North American society, their collective consciousness of such a vision has virtually disappeared.[136]

The stated vision of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren currently centers on the missional task of 'multiplying churches to see Canada transformed'.[137] Can this missional vision serve as an adequate centre that judges, interprets, and transforms a community's convictions around a central common perspective? Is a missional vision capable of providing a hermeneutic that could guide Mennonite Brethren in their reading of both the affirming and restricting texts in the New Testament regarding the participation of women in leadership within their churches?[138]

In light of the present diversity of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren, the potential significance of McClendon's baptist vision would depend upon whether Mennonite Brethren can perceive its ability to make sense of their present experience in Canada in relation to the narrative of God's people in Scripture.[139] Furthermore, Mennonite Brethren would need to discern whether the baptist vision can provide an adequate and relevant centre for the diverse expressions of Mennonite Brethren thought and practice that are sometimes sustained by conflicting convictions. Without a comprehensive integrating vision, the Mennonite Brethren may not be aware that they are living out convictions that could be disconnected from either the biblical narrative or their own journey, which has made them who they are.

Second, intrinsic to McClendon's proposal of a baptist vision is an appeal for Mennonite Brethren to discover and understand their own convictions. McClendon observes that 'theology means struggle'.[140] Mennonite Brethren's engagement with their own convictions will necessarily involve both an awareness of the dynamic historical process that has led to the formation of their present conviction set as well as an assessment of how they embody overlapping convictional communities, such as evangelicalism, fundamentalism, Anabaptism, and feminism. In

[136] This is articulated most clearly by Delbert Wiens. See Delbert L. Wiens, 'New Wineskins for Old Wine: A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church', *The Christian Leader*, October 12, 1965, pp. 1-28 (insert); Delbert L. Wiens, 'From the Village to the City: A Grammar for the Languages We Are', *Direction* 2:4 (1973), pp. 98-149; and Delbert L. Wiens, 'Mennonite: Neither Liberal nor Evangelical', *Direction* 20:1 (1991), pp. 38-63.

[137] See Willy Reimer, 'Unpacking the Mission We All Share', *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, April 2015, pp. 8-9. The mission statement of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches is 'to multiply Christ-centred churches to see Canada transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ'.

[138] For an attempt to use mission as a hermeneutical guide, see 'Board of Faith and Life Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution', p. 15.

[139] A recent attempt by Canadian Conference leadership to apply the dynamics of the first century church to the experience of contemporary churches, called Regenerate 21-01, did not 'catch on' with Mennonite Brethren as a unifying vision. See Sam Reimer, 'Measurements Committee Summative Report to Gathering 2012', in *Gathering 2012: One Lord One Church One Mission Yearbook* (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Winnipeg, July 11-14, 2012), p. 116.

[140] McClendon, *Ethics* (2002), pp. 17, 43.

order to identify the interdependence of their convictions, Mennonite Brethren will need to clarify the often unstated assumptions and methods that are used to justify this mixture of shared and contested beliefs and values.

The Canadian Mennonite Brethren continue to struggle with the perceived irrelevance of their own historical narrative, thus providing congregations with few tools beyond a blatant pragmatism by which to assess the assumptions and values of the diverse convictional communities embraced by their members.[141] As J. B. Toews has observed,

> we had opened ourselves to the influences of our American evangelical environment without any provision for examining the emphases and assertions of such influences. There is no evidence of any systematic effort made in North America to focus the theology that is unique to our spiritual legacy.[142]

This is a serious concern, particularly in light of how the correct 'biblical' position regarding women in the church is often narrowly defined as either complementarian or egalitarian, without a clear understanding of the underlying yet opposing assumptions. Furthermore, the justification of convictions will require more effort than a straightforward appeal to the authority of Scripture or the categorical rejection of culture in the debate over women in church leadership.

The way through this dilemma, I suggest, is found neither in the impossible return back to an earlier time along the Mennonite Brethren narrative nor in the formation of rigid enclaves representing diverse external convictional communities. Rather, McClendon's call for communal discernment, reflected in an ongoing conversation, represents the challenge facing Mennonite Brethren as they seek both to discover and justify their own convictions through reading Scripture together under the Spirit's guidance. It is in this process that Mennonite Brethren may discern how conflicting convictions representing diverse convictional communities can both enhance and hinder their own theological perspective. McClendon and Smith's attempt to set down 'rules' regarding how convictions may be justified, although pointing in helpful directions, needs to be contextualized in order to adequately address the conflicting convictions among Mennonite Brethren.

Finally, McClendon anticipates several pragmatic issues that will face the Mennonite Brethren as they continue to engage in the practice of communal discernment. While McClendon vaguely suggests that the church needs to develop structures and identify rules that could guide and facilitate the practice of communal discernment; he offers few practical directions.

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[141] For example, see Elmer J. Thiessen, 'Reflections on Natural Church Development', *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 22, 2000), pp. 6-7.

[142] Toews, 'The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology', pp. 22-23.

Perhaps his example of upper and lower level rules that guide the baptist practice of reading of Scripture could provide a helpful model for the practice of communal discernment.[143] What are the practice-constitutive rules that simply indicate Mennonite Brethren are appropriately engaged in conversation around their convictions? What strategies coherent with the shared convictions of the Mennonite Brethren should guide the practice of communal discernment? A clear articulation of the rules of the practice of communal discernment would enhance Mennonite Brethren's ability to relate Scripture to their own narrative experience.[144]

Furthermore, how do Mennonite Brethren validate the criterial authority of the gathered congregation and facilitate the involvement of different voices? Mennonite Brethren affirm in their Confession of Faith that it is the Spirit who 'guides the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture'.[145] While they have intentionally engaged in the practice of communal discernment at a denominational level, the continuing challenge is how to engage in the practice of communal discernment at the congregational level, since churches have now been freed to develop their own contextualized response to women's involvement in church leadership.[146] Shifting governance patterns within Mennonite Brethren churches over the past two decades have emphasized the authoritative nature of elders, thereby implicitly questioning the effectiveness and relevance of the gathered community.[147] This has been complicated further by the difficulty of faithfully merging the contributions of both 'authorities in' the church and 'authorities on' theology in the practices of Scripture reading, discernment, and teaching. Put another way, how do the Mennonite Brethren move beyond the tensions that have often existed between the tasks of primary and secondary theology?

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[143] See McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 37-38.

[144] Cf. F. C. Peters, 'Consensus and Change in Our Brotherhood', *Mennonite Brethren Herald* Supplement, January 12, 1968, pp. 2-8; and 'Consensus and Change in Respect to Ethical Issues', *Yearbook: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 51st Session* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1969), pp. 11-12.

[145] *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000), p. 23. Mennonite Brethren have self-consciously recognized, 'we practice a corporate hermeneutic which listens to the concerns of individuals and churches, but discerns together the meaning and intent of the Scriptures. This safeguards our denomination from the extremes of individualism and private interpretations, but allows for free study and discussion'. See 'Resolution on Confession of Faith', *1987 Yearbook: 57th Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America* (Abbotsford, 7-11 August 1987), p. 44. See also Lynn Jost and Connie Faber, *Family Matters: Encountering the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), pp. 31-32.

[146] See 'Board of Faith and Life Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution', p. 15. For example of a congregation's engagement in communal discernment, see Brad Sumner and Keith Reid, 'Discernment in the Local Church: What Our Congregational Discussion on Women in Ministry Leadership Taught Us about the Anabaptist Practice of Community Hermeneutics', in Dueck, Guenther, and Heidebrecht, *Renewing Identity and Mission*, pp. 201-214.

[147] For a reflection on changing leadership models among Mennonite Brethren, see Bruce L. Guenther and Doug Heidebrecht, 'The Elusive Model of Biblical Leadership', *Direction* 28:2 (1999), pp. 153-165.

The continuing journey of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren regarding the issue of women in church leadership illustrates some of the struggles that emerge with the inevitable presence of conflicting convictions within the church. McClendon's practice of communal discernment proposes a way forward that invites not only the Mennonite Brethren, but also baptistic churches to justify their own convictions in relation to their reading of Scripture and in light of their experience as a gathered community. As McClendon recognises, this is not a foolproof strategy; 'not a path from which none can possibly stray, but a trail plain enough to be followed'.[148] It is a journey that offers Mennonite Brethren the opportunity to discover the Spirit's leading in the midst of external cultural change and the presence of conflicting convictions within.

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[148] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 468.

Can Baptists Be Deified? The Significance of the Early Christian Understanding of *Theosis* for Baptist Spirituality

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Abstract: In a recent revival of interest in the Christian understanding of *theosis*, Baptist theologians usually express marginal and cautious interest, predominantly addressing this concept within the context of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. While insights from modern Orthodox theology are indispensable for understanding deification, they should not limit the theological scope that *theosis* can offer for a post-modern narrative of contemporary contextualisation. The creative fluidity of this concept in Patristic theology, along with its universal Christian perspective that transcends any denominational compartmentalisation, makes *theosis* an effective tool for engaging in original and constructive theological discussion that can tremendously enrich Baptist spirituality.

Key words: *theosis*, deification, patristic theology, Orthodox tradition, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, soteriology

In 2004 when we were organising what was the first international conference on *theosis* at Drew University[1], one individual called us inquiring about the conference, wondering whether it was organised by the Medical Humanities programme, because this person thought that *theosis* was perhaps a new kind of disease she did not know about. Interestingly enough, when we go to the world of Patristic theology, the deification theme is commonly present. The discourse on deification is not only addressed among the intellectual elite, but also is an aspect of popular Christian theology. By the fourth century, especially among Greek-speaking Christians, the concept of deification acquires tremendous popularity, both in speculative and lay theology. Starting with Athanasius, deification not only gains momentum of convincing force in his fight against the anti-Nicaeans, but also profound significance in Christian spirituality. It is in a way striking, reading Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-387),

[1] 'Partakers of the Divine Nature: Deification/*Theosis* in the Christian Traditions', hosted by the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, on 21-22 May 2004. Proceedings of the conference were published in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008).

to notice that in his *Catechetical Orations* he, without any introduction or further explanation, freely refers to the Holy Spirit as deifier.[2]When Cyril of Jerusalem refers to the Holy Spirit as deifier, and does not go into any details to explain what he means, this is a good indication that ordinary Christians, including those who are about to be baptised, are not strangers to this notion.

Cyril of Jerusalem is not alone, and certainly he is not the major figure who is responsible for popularisation of this notion. He is, rather, a good example of the degree to which the deification theme had become a common subject in Christian spirituality, perhaps resembling in its practical application the 'born again' evangelical theology of today. I do not think anyone would be surprised to hear references to being 'born again' in Baptist congregations. Often these references, however, are made without further theological explanation of the precise meaning of being 'born again'. Some general understanding of this type of theology seems to be presupposed by the audience.

The deification theme in Patristic theology often had similar use and appeal until, with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the sixth century and Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, it became an elaborate ornament of Byzantine theology and a profound source of inspiration to Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality. The Latin Church from the Patristic period, throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, freely referred to *theosis* as well.[3] Even one direct reference to *theosis* is found in such an unsuspected document as *The Malleus Meleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*), which was the only bright spot of the whole text.[4] Magisterial Reformers were not strangers to *theosis* either. Deification can be traced in John Calvin and Martin Luther, as well as in modern Lutheran theology.[5]

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[2] *Catech*. 4.16. NPNF 2 7:23.

[3] See, for example, Gerald Bonner, 'Augustine's Concept of Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), pp. 369–386; Augustine Casiday, 'St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81', *Sobornost* 23 (2001), pp. 23–44; Isaac Chae, 'Justification and Deification in Augustine: A Study of His Doctrine of Justification' (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1999); Mary Noreen Rita Marrocco, 'Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses' (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2000); Mary Elizabeth Martin, 'Orphans, Widows and Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation of Augustine's Concept of Adoption and Deification' (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2003); David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Nathan R. Kerr, 'St. Anselm: *Theoria* and the Doctrine of Logic of Perfection', in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 175–88; Nancy J. Hudson, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2007).

[4] *The Malleus Meleficarum*, trans. Christopher S Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 221.

[5] See, for example, Todd J. Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gifts: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Julie Canlis, 'Calvin, Osiander and

Endorsement of *theosis* can also be found in John Wesley.[6] However, as in post-Enlightenment modernity, the scholarly and intellectual emphasis was placed on reason and strictly rational argumentation; most allusions to anything resembling mystical apparitions were eliminated from academic and subsequently lay discourse as irrational, superstitious, and the worst: unscientific. This tendency eventually led to the disappearance from the scope of theological analysis of many themes that had been discussed in Christian theology for centuries, *theosis* included. As a result, in lay theology the whole idea of deification might sound to some as blasphemous and too pretentious, and for others totally absurd and non-Christian. Even in Patristic studies the language of deification for some scholars caused such a disturbance that in a number of English translations of early Christian texts, passages addressing this concept were either omitted or replaced with alternative interpretive translation. For Adolf Harnack, who

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Participation in God', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2004), pp. 169–184; idem, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2010); John McClean, '*Perichoresis*, *Theosis* and Union with Christ in the Thought of John Calvin', *Reformed Theological Review* 68 (2009), pp. 130–141; Carl Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002), pp. 36–57; Andrew J. Ollerton, 'Quasi Deificari: Deification in the Theology of John Calvin', *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011), pp. 237–254; Friedrich Beisser, 'Zur Frage der Vergottlichung des Menschen bei Martin Luther', *Kerygma und Dogma* 39 (1993), pp. 226–281; Dennis Bielfeldt, 'Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), pp. 401–420; Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998); Lowell Green, 'The Question of *Theosis* in the Perspective of Lutheran Christology', in Dean Wenthe and David P. Scaer, eds., *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), pp. 163–180; Joachim Heubach, ed., *Luther und Theosis* (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1990); Richard Jenson, '*Theosis* and Preaching: Implications for Preaching in the Finnish Luther Research', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31 (2004), pp. 432–437; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004); Paul Lehninger, 'Luther and *Theosis*: Deification in the Theology of Martin Luther' (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1999); Tuomo Mannermaa, "*Theosis* as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995), pp. 37–48; Kurt Marquart, 'Luther and *Theosis*', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000), pp. 182–205; Simo Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch? Die Vergöttlichung als Thema der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1513 bis 1519* (Stuttgart: P. von Zabern, 1994); Franz Posset, '"Deification" in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993), pp. 103–126; Jeffrey Silcock, 'Luther on Justification and Participation in the Divine Life: New Light on an Old Problem', *Lutheran Theological Journal* 34 (2000), pp. 127–139.

[6] Michael J. Christensen, '*Theosis* and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31 (1996), pp. 71–94; idem, 'John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love', in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 219–229; John Drury, 'Luther and Wesley on Union and Impartation in Light of Recent Finnish Luther Research', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40 (2005), pp. 58–68; David C. Ford, 'Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33 (1988), pp. 285–312; S. T. Kimbrough, 'Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008), pp. 199–212; Steve McCormick, '*Theosis* in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26 (1991), pp. 38–103; idem, 'A Trinitarian Paradigm of *Theosis*: A Context for the Emergence of a Wesleyan Notion of Christ Transfiguring Culture', in Maxine Walker, ed., *Grace in the Academic Community: Festschrift for Cecil R. Paul* (San Diego, Calif.: Point Loma Press, 1996), pp. 193–206.

inadvertently brought *theosis* back into academic discussion, deification was seen as one of the crucial concepts that influenced the Hellenisation, hence corruption, of early Christianity and of the transformation of the living faith 'into the creed to be believed'. The impact of this alteration of the original faith, in Harnack's opinion, changed 'the glowing hope of the kingdom of heaven into doctrine of immortality and deification'.[7] Even in modern Eastern Orthodox theology that is most commonly—and rightly so—associated with support for the doctrine of deification; academic discourse on the issue only gained popularity in the twentieth century. The first comprehensive essay on deification in the Greek Fathers was published by Russian Patristic scholar Ivan Popov in 1906, and was only recently translated into English for the first time.[8] It is also interesting that Popov, in addition to the theological education he received in Russia, also studied in Germany and attended Harnack's lectures. Of course, his perspective on *theosis* was diametrically opposite to Harnack's, but Harnack could be responsible for inspiring modern Orthodox interest in the subject.[9]

Response to Harnack might also have helped to ignite a more accommodating perspective on *theosis* among Roman Catholic historians. Jules Gross's book on deification in the Greek Fathers, published in 1938, along with an entry on divinisation in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* that, in addition to the Patristic period also examined development of this notion in Roman Catholic theology up to the seventeenth century, were the most comprehensive surveys on the subject for most of the twentieth century.[10] More recently, ecumenical dialogue has drawn renewed attention to deification.[11] For the last thirty years or so, the notion of deification has received extensive attention in a number of

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[7] Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1 (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997), p. 45.

[8] Ivan Popov, 'The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church', in Vladimir Kharlamov, ed., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2011), pp. 42–82.

[9] There is a significant number of Eastern Orthodox publications on deification from very popular to academic. For a good introduction, see Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

[10] Jules Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs: Contribution historique a la doctrine de la grace* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1938), trans. into English as *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers* (Anaheim, Calif.: A & C Press, 2002); *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957), 3:1370–1459. See also H. Rondet, 'La divinisation du chrétien', *Nouvelle Révue Théologique* 17, no. 5–6 (1949), pp. 449–476 and 561–588.

[11] For example, Kenneth L. Bakken, 'Holy Spirit and Theosis: Toward a Lutheran Theology of Healing', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no 4 (1994), pp. 409–423; Paul R. Hinlicky, 'Theological Anthropology: Toward Integrating Theosis and Justification by Faith', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34 (1997), pp. 38–73; Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Justification and Theosis in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective', in *Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998), pp. 25-41; Jouko Martikainen, 'Man's Salvation: Deification or Justification? Observation of Key-Words in the Orthodox and the Lutheran Tradition', *Sobornost* 7, no. 3 (1976), pp. 180–192; John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, eds., *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress Pub., 1992).

dissertations and publications that deal with particular Christian theologians.[12] This increased interest in *theosis* now comes from different denominational and academic perspectives, where the topic itself surpasses a strictly Eastern Orthodox affiliation and becomes more common and appreciated in contemporary theological discourse.

In this 'Renaissance' of *theosis* research, Baptist theologians are not lacking. As was aptly demonstrated by Mark Medle [13] such Baptist theologians as Clark H. Pinnock, Stanley J. Grenz, Douglas Harink, and Paul S. Fiddes work with the deification theme not only from a soteriological perspective, but also employ this theme more broadly 'as they engage pneumatology, ecclesiology, and theological anthropology'.[14] By doing so they have challenged and, I would argue, enriched the traditional Baptist approach to salvation as simply a transactional, immediate, voluntary, individual moment of conversion. If in North American Baptist theology, for the most part, salvation has been understood in such a way as to overemphasise justification, where justification is merely conceptualised as a legal-forensic remedying of the defective human condition through the atoning death of Christ, Pinnock, Grenz, Harink, and Fiddes offer an understanding of salvation as participation in God. Hence, they do not emphasise only the momentary, transactional event of conversion, but also implement the aspects of Christian life of sanctification and spiritual growth as the soteriological process of being in Christ. This participatory being in Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit also communicates a Christian understanding of union with God that incorporates individual, ecclesial, and eschatological perspectives. As Medley states in his assessment, 'Being "in Christ" …, believers acquire a new identity which empowers them to live with and in conformity to the life of Christ, sharing in his cruciformity so that the body of Christ may come to share in Christ's glory'.[15] The prominence of God's grace in human deification is strongly confirmed by these Baptist theologians; thus, in agreement with Eastern Orthodox tradition the Creator-creature distinction is preserved. In addressing *theosis*, what Pinnock, Grenz, Harink, and Fiddes succeed in doing is to supersede Baptist denominational theological boundaries. They attempt to engage 'the whole of the Christian tradition, in its diversity and richness', and by doing

[12] The full list of these dissertations and publications would require an additional bibliography.
[13] Mark S. Medley, 'Participating in God: The Appropriation of Theosis by Contemporary Baptist Theologians', in Vladimir Kharlamov, ed., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 156 (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 205–246. See also Daniel Clendenin, 'Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of *Theosis*', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (1994), pp. 365–379, and Robert Vincent Rakestraw, 'Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997), pp. 257–269.
[14] Medley, 'Participating in God', p. 208.
[15] Ibid., p. 236.

so, according to Medley, they, first, show that Baptist theology 'is contiguous with the prior theological tradition'; and second: 'Theology which is to be heeded is not simply the theology of the church to which a particular writer belongs, but the theology of all Christians.'[16] At the same time, Medley accurately concludes in his essay, they do not 'offer any unique or distinctive contribution to a dogmatic understanding of *theosis'*.[17] In addition, their heavy dependency on modern Eastern Orthodox theology also keeps them from addressing deification in a more constructive and original perspective. Of course, it is not prudent to neglect the rich history of the Eastern Orthodox tradition concerning *theosis*; however, it is also myopic to only be content with Eastern Orthodox formulations on deification. The contribution to the deification theme of the Baptist theologians discussed above is limited to the arbitrary extrication of some already developed and formulated perceptions they find appealing to their own theological discourse, while still keeping them dependent on modern Orthodox expression as a unique representation of *theosis* in Christian theology. It also keeps them captive to an illusory idea of homogeneous teaching on *theosis* that this tradition sometimes claims to possess.[18] Even though Patristic tradition is organically and closely connected with modern Orthodox expression, Patristic tradition should not be identified with contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy. In Patristic tradition itself we find pluralistic and far from homogeneous expression on *theosis*. Precisely both the elusive and creative fluidity of this concept as it is expressed in Patristic theology is what makes it attractive for a post-modern narrative of contemporary contextualisation.

References to *theosis* in Patristic tradition are numerous; however, the task of tracing the precise meaning for what Patristic writers understood as a human being becoming a god is rather challenging. It could be argued that the notion of *theosis* is a continuously occurring belief that has been present in Christian theology from the beginning. On the other hand, there is no unilateral consensus among early Christian authors about the precise meaning of deification. A significant part of this complexity comes from the theological vocabulary that was used to communicate this notion. When we come to what I call 'the deificational vocabulary', we are astounded by the great variety of terms that both point to the complexity of the notion

[16]Ibid., p. 235 with reference to James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago, 'Introduction', in James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago, eds., *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2001), p. 3.
[17] Medley, 'Participating in God', p. 246.
[18] Norman Russell is one among few Orthodox theologians who acknowledges some tensions in modern Orthodox tradition when it comes to *theosis*; however, he still downplays this discrepancy as convergent speculative theological exercise and reaffirms Eastern Orthodox 'copyright' on deification. Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, pp. 169–174.

and to the significant interest in applying it. Among the conceptual synonymous equivalents for deification in Greek, with the corresponding English terms, we can find: union, participation, partaking, communion/partnership, re-creation, intertwined or influx with the divine, attainment of similitude with God, imparting, transformation, elevation, transmutation, commingling, assimilation, reintegration, intermingling, rebirth, regeneration, transmigration, and transfiguration. However, the frequency and personal preference of each particular author to use one designator over another, and often a combination of several of them, varies greatly. The most commonly used terms are union, participation, and communion. However, we need to be aware that the terms listed above are not only applicable to the deification context; they could and do refer to other issues as well. And it leads us to what I call the 'technical' language of deification. A number of Greek words that explicitly, and also in a more univocal sense, point to nothing else but one or another form of becoming a god, making into a god, in-goding, or deifying activity and deified state, namely, deification. The technical language of deification is not less diverse and complex than the conceptual language. The Greek technical vocabulary for the idea of deification is significantly broader than merely 'θέωσις/*theosis'*. In Greek, basically five groups of words were used to explicitly communicate deification. The extraordinary richness of the Greek language offered Patristic writers a broad selection to choose from. Often in the same author we can find an extensive variety of technical deification language being used. The same words are sometimes utilised to refer to both criticism of pagan divinisation and promotion of Christian deification, which does not simplify the task of extricating the meaning of the Christian understanding of deification.[19]

In spite of the popularity that this notion experienced in Patristic theology, we do not have, to the best of my knowledge, any specific treatise solidly dedicated to this subject. In Patristic tradition we have works on the Trinity, incarnation, chastity, and patience, but not on deification. Often the discourse on deification was contextualised within the development of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, and *theosis* was addressed on the periphery of such theological issues as the full divinity of Christ, immortality and eternal life, the image of God in the human being, sanctification, redemption, sacramental theology, and general and individual eschatology. The process of *theosis* that introduces human beings inextricably into the presence of God is, according to Pseudo-

[19] For concise discussion of deification terminology see Vladimir Kharlamov, *Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2009), pp. 20–24; see also, Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 333–344.

Dionysius the Areopagite, 'a mystery which cannot be taught, [but] it puts souls firmly in the presence of God'.[20]

The same Pseudo-Dionysius provides us with the first definition of deification in Christian theology, which does not come to us until the sixth century:

> Blessed God who transcends everything and who is one and also triune has resolved, for reasons unclear to us but obvious to himself, to ensure the salvation of rational beings. This could not happen without the deifying of the saved. And deification consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God.[21]

In this definition alone, which is far from being comprehensive, we already can see a strong emphasis on the transcendence or significant otherness of God, divine Trinitarian manifestation, and the predominantly soteriological implication of *theosis* as divine likeness and union with God. Christian understanding of *theosis* precisely grew out of examining primarily practical soteriological aspects of Christian everyday life and spirituality. And as the New Testament gives legitimacy to various conceptions of salvation besides justification, Patristic tradition never defined salvation in one particularly fixed way either.[22] There is more than one theological metaphor for salvation in Patristic theology.

Traditional proof texts supporting *theosis* in the Bible are Ps 82:6 which reads, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you', (NRSV) reaffirmed in Jn 10:34 by Christ himself and 2 Pet 1:4, 'thus he [God and Saviour Jesus Christ] has given us, …, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world …, and may become participants in the divine nature' (NRSV). None of these passages were actually used extensively by the Fathers to support *theosis* until much later. The place wherein Baptist theology, the New Testament, and Patristic tradition converge when it comes to deification is the statement that we are children of God. When people have children it makes these children also human, but if Christians are children of God by grace, what does it make them if not gods by grace? Divine filiation or divine adoption was integrally incorporated into the deification theme from early on. In the fourth century, especially in Athanasius, deification and divine filiation become virtually synonymous.

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[20]Letter 9.1; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 283.
[21] *EH* 1.3; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, p. 198 (slightly modified).
[22] Cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 7.

For the Church Fathers, the Incarnation of Christ is the cornerstone of human salvation, where divine filiation, forgiveness, healing, restoration, and union with God become essentially integrated aspects of deification. As God, Christ deified his human nature at the moment of the Incarnation. Thus, he is the only one who simultaneously is the deifier, because of his divinity, and the deified, because of his humanity. This act of union brings the true reunion between God and humanity placing Christ in the role of the true and only mediator between God and humankind. The Incarnation of Christ provides the main support for the introduction of what is termed 'the deification exchange formula'. The first attestation to the deification exchange formula comes from Irenaeus in the second century: 'The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through his immeasurable love, became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is'.[23] In this statement Irenaeus, according to Kallistos Ware, is paraphrasing Paul's statement in 2 Cor 8:9: 'For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'. Irenaeus underlines Christ's self-identification with humanity and relies on Paul's theology of Christ as the second Adam, who recapitulates the human race in himself (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22; 15:45; Eph 1:10).[24] This deification formula can also find support in Col 2:9–10: 'For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority'. Relying on Irenaeus, Athanasius in the fourth century coins the classical expression of the deification formula with explicit emphasis on *theosis*: 'For he [the Logos] was made human that we might be made god'.[25] In his writings, with slight modifications, Athanasius repeatedly makes this statement.[26] This powerful, striking, memorable, well-balanced and eloquent statement is a strong affirmation of Christ's divinity and humanity. The deification of a human being is the other side of Incarnation.[27] *Theosis* is like a reverse Incarnation. The sense of a deification exchange formula and the reciprocity it connotes penetrate many aspects of Patristic theology. Through the death of Christ, his deathlessness is imputed to believers. Christ died that we may have eternal life. Through Christ's humility his glory is bestowed upon believers, and so

[23] *Haer*. 5. Pref.; SC 153:14. Irenaeus also incorporates the divine filiation into his theology, 'He [Christ] would become the Son of man for this purpose, that man also might become the son of God'. *Haer*. 3.10.2; ANF 1:424.
[24] Kallistos Ware, 'Salvation and Theosis in Orthodox Theology', in W. Scheemelcher et al., eds., *Luther et la réforme allemande dans une perspective oecuménique* (Chambésy-Genève: Éditions du Centre orthodoxe du patriarcat oecuménique, 1983), p. 171.
[25] *De Inc*. 54.3; PG 25:192.
[26] *De Inc*. 16; *De Decr*. 14; *Ar*. 1.38, 48; 2.61; 3.33, 34, 40; *Ep. Adelph*. 4; *Ep. Epict*. 6; *Ep. Max*. 2; *Vit. Anton*. 74.
[27] Cf. Athanasius, *Ar*. 3.33.

on. 'The real anthropological meaning of deification is Christification', as Nellas exclaims, which 'is not advocating an external imitation or a simple ethical improvement but a real Christification'.[28] However, the symmetrical structure of this 'exchange formula' by no means assumes a relationship between equal participants.[29] As C. R. Strange remarks, Athanasius 'believed that when the true God became truly man, he did not do so to make it possible for men to become gods in the sense in which he was God, but in order to transform what it means to be a man'.[30] If the Logos is the Son of God and God by nature, Christians become children of God by adoption and therefore are gods only by grace. They are never gods in an ontological sense, as only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the true meaning of the term, possesses authentic eternality; God is the only being who always existed and does not have anyone as the cause of his existence. Being a god, a deified human being does not cease to be human, as the Logos after the Incarnation did not cease to be consubstantial with the Father. In other words, *theosis* is not substantive or ontological transmutation of human nature into something else than human; it is soteriological qualitative regeneration. Re-created creation still remains a creation. Athanasius in one place emphasises, 'Things which partake cannot be identical or similar to that whereof they partake'.[31] On numerous occasions the Church Fathers repeat, 'We are to become like God, as far as this is possible for human nature'.[32] Being gods by grace, humans are transformed or transfigured but, nevertheless, remain always human beings. Thus, *theosis* is not the denial of humanness but rather its fulfilment. Deification, as Norman Russell notes, 'is like a second creation carried out by the Creator, but this time from within'.[33] If originally a human being was created sinless but with the possibility to sin (which often was understood that Adam and Eve were created in a state of innocence, but not perfection), at the eschatological moment of *theosis*, the human person achieves a state of perfection through the regenerative grace of God and becomes not only sinless through redemption but also incapable anymore of falling into sin. In this way the fullness and completeness of salvation receives explicitly deificational connotation; saved human beings become sinless for eternity through grace resembling the sinlessness of God.

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[28] Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 39.
[29] Vladimir Kharlamov, 'Rhetorical Application of *Theosis* in Greek Patristic Theology', in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 120.
[30] C. R. Strange, 'Athanasius on Divinization', *Studia Patristica* 16:6 (1985), p. 343.
[31] Athanasius, *Ep. Afr.*7; NPNF 2 4:492.
[32] Basil of Caesarea, *Spir*. 1.2; *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 16.
[33] Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, p. 172.

Further on, *theosis* is synonymous with in-corruption, eternal life, perfection, unadulterated goodness, in other words, attributes that are naturally present in God, and by salvific grace bestowed upon and perfected in human beings. Those deificational qualifiers reflect participatory aspects of *theosis*, when a human being becomes a partaker of the divine nature.

The deificational process starts here on earth with divine birth, understood by the Church Fathers both as conversion and baptism, which proceeds through spiritual growth, presented in terms of imitation of Christ and sanctification, and culminates in the life to come, when deification reaches its completion. This process of dynamic deificational transformation is often, but not always, constructed around the distinction between the image of God in which all humankind was created and the likeness of God that presents an eschatological soteriological *telos*. If the transition from the image of God to likeness constitutes transformation within human nature and corresponds to ontological and metaphysical aspects of theological anthropology, the understanding of *theosis* as a vision of God and union with God presents the spiritual inner workings of God within a human soul. The union with God is manifested when Christians have what Paul calls, 'the mind of Christ'.[34] And Christ, whose humanity is in harmonious symphony with his divinity, manifests to us the perfect humanity and brings it into an intimate relationship with God. Cyril of Alexandria in one place remarks:

> [Christ] wishes them [his followers] to be bound together tightly with an unbreakable bond of love, that they may advance to such a degree of unity that their freely chosen association might even become an image of the natural unity that is conceived to exist between the Father and the Son."[35]

This sentiment is echoed by Simo Peura: 'Love is unifying power that tends to change the loving person into what is loved'.[36]

In the process of the deificational unification of a human being with God, this unity 'transcends the nature of the mind through which it is joined to things beyond itself', says Pseudo-Dionysius; 'We should be taken wholly out of ourselves and become wholly of God'.[37] This epistemological identification of the process of knowing with the object of knowledge brings the knower into direct participation with the reality of

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[34] 1 Cor 2:16.
[35] Cyril of Alexandria, *Jn*. 17.11,972b; cit. in Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p. 143.
[36] Simo Peura, 'What God Gives Man Receives', in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998), p. 81.
[37] *DN* 7.1; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, p. 106.

God: 'Knowledge unites knower and known'.[38] The reality of the knower becomes the reality of God living through this individual; in other words, it deifies the knower. 'Through the knowledge we have, which is geared to our faculties, we may be uplifted as far as possible to the Cause of everything'.[39] In this instance, perfection coincides and becomes identical with true self-consciousness. The manifestation of the vision of God is not so much external contemplation of God as external object of thought, but the thinking itself. For the thinking to be perfect, it must not only be a thinking about God, but it also should be a perfect self-thinking, that is, the best realisation of the given capacity to participate in the reality of God. The process itself connects the reality of true thinking with the reality of the ultimate object of thinking, intermingling God-given capacity with its source.

This union of a human individual with God is both real and differentiated. It does not presuppose any annihilation of human nature or absorption of a human individual into God. It is a union of divine grace at work that leads to a transformative fulfilment of the full potential of human nature. Union with God is not so much a union of natures as a union of minds, the state of gnosiological identification. Union with God is what illuminates the human mind. Jaroslav Pelikan, with reference to Maximus the Confessor, states:

> Part of the process of salvation as deification was the gradual assimilation of the mind of man to the mind of God. Through the grace of prayer it was joined to God and it learned to associate only with God, becoming ever more godlike and withdrawing itself more and more from the dominance of this mortal life.[40]

Vladimir Lossky in turn remarks:

> There is no theology apart from experience; it is necessary to change, to become a new man [*sic.*]. To know God one must draw near to Him. No one who does not follow the path of union with God can be a theologian. The way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification.[41]

In Baptist theology the emphasis is predominantly put on the power of sin and the lost condition of any human individual who does not know Christ. Patristic tradition, well aware of human sinfulness, closely connects it with the state of corruption of human nature, which is the cause of our mortality, both spiritual and physical. Therefore, the emphasis on

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[38] *DN* 7.4; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, pp. 109–110.
[39] *DN* 5.9; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, p. 102.
[40] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2:14.
[41] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), p. 39.

immortality and everlasting life receives a more pronounced soteriological implication in the Church Fathers. The redeeming grace of God in *theosis* is the victory of life over death. Salvation is not only redemption of sins in forensic justification; it is a gift of eternal life through divine grace that restores the human being to a state of incorruption that grants immortality. Incorruptibility and eternal existence are among essential attributes of God, and through the salvific grace of God they become bestowed on human beings as acquired attributes of human redeemed nature. This mutual sharing of the same attributes by God and the saved human individual brings the idea of *theosis* into focus. However, again, ironically, a deified human individual is not just called a god, but is often addressed to as being 'made a god'[42]. Thus, forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life are also intricate aspects of deification.

While Baptists have emphasised justification by faith, which provides the cornerstone of Baptist theology; in *theosis* we also have a discourse on deification by faith. *Theosis* is only possible by grace through faith, not by works. In the *Philokalia*, a five-volume collection of Patristic writings on spirituality that covers works from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries, we find a treatise by Mark the Ascetic entitled, *On Those Who Think That They Are Made Righteous by Works*, which aptly begins: 'In the texts which follow, the belief of those in error [those who believe in righteousness by work] will be refuted'.[43] On numerous occasions, the Fathers do not tire of stressing that deification is only possible by grace; Maximus the Confessor asserts that we 'become god through union with God by faith'.[44] *Theosis* is the work of God. As Maximus states in another place:

> It was indeed indispensable that He who is by nature the Creator of the being of all things should Himself, through grace, accomplish their deification, and in this way reveal Himself to be not only the author of being but also the giver of eternal well-being.[45]

If, for example, we contrast forensic justification with the work of *theosis* as redemptive healing, we come to a quite striking illustration of how the gospel message of divine love, the effectiveness of God's grace, individual transformation, and communal care are played out more vividly and consistently. When we think about salvation in terms of forensic

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[42] One of very common words used by Patristic authors to communicate the idea of deification is θεοποιέω, which literally means "to make into a god."

[43] *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, trans. and ed. C.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kalistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979–95), 1:125.

[44] Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God* 2.9, in *Philokalia*, 2:190.

[45] Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God* 4.32, in *Philokalia*, 2:243.

justification the nature of sin as a crime and the sinner as a criminal dominates the picture. A crime deserves eradication and a criminal deserves punishment. There should not be any toleration for a crime or sympathy to a criminal. Any crime should invoke the sense of guilt, shame, conviction, and condemnation, and rightly so. If we think of sin as a disease, our perspective drastically changes. A sick person should not be punished, but healed. That person requires care, love, compassion, sympathy and support, while the cause of his or her illness is what needs to be eradicated. Not punishment, but recuperation and wellbeing become the focus. The cause of the illness is not tolerated, but the perspective on the individual who is affected by this cause significantly changes and brings to light basic Christian virtues. A Christian understanding of *theosis* introduces the necessary remedy for healing—divine grace—and stipulates the necessary conditions involving not only an 'infected' individual, but also a caring community. When Christ is the doctor and Christians are patients, a more realistic picture of human sinfulness and the ways of dealing with it emerges. It does not diminish the nature and seriousness of sin. It does not introduce a 'cheap' salvation. It unites the Christian community in its fight against sin and manifests divine mercy, forgiveness, and love revealed by Christ. Most of all, it points to the cure of human nature from the root of sin. In one place Athanasius suggests that if God simply decrees (which God is perfectly capable of doing) to remove the curse of sin from humans, 'humanity would nevertheless have remained as Adam was before the transgression, receiving grace externally and not having it mingled with the body'.[46] Thus, human nature, by not being regenerated in terms of the sanctifying effects of deification that embraces the totality of humanness from within, would not benefit significantly, but might become worse and would remain in 'slavery and liability to sin' in perpetual repetition of Adam's experience. 'Forever sinning, it would be forever in need of pardon and it would never be freed'.[47] Declaration of forgiveness from the curse of sin correlates only to the outward legal proclamation that does not necessarily affect the inner being of the individual. It is a judicial acquittal that removes the guilt formally without eradicating the tendency or inclination to commit crime again. In the therapeutic approach to *theosis* the cause of sin within human nature is uprooted, removed, and destroyed. The individual is not only cured from the consequences and effects of sin, but also freed from succumbing to sin again. Human nature becomes both forgiven and redeemed in its totality and immune to falling into sin again. This does manifest the healing power in *theosis*.

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[46] Athanasius, *Ar*. 2.68; Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 130.
[47] Athanasius, *Ar*. 2.68; Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 130.

The Christian understanding of *theosis* for Patristic authors communicates the essence of Christianity. It presents the union of the practical aspects of Christianity expressed in complex depth, or as the Church Fathers would term it—the symphony of *praxis* and *theoria*. It does not present just one tenet of Christian theology, but intricately interweaves and penetrates the entire scope of Christian theology. *Theosis* addresses the Trinitarian understanding of God and does so not from a merely abstract theological argumentation, but through an in-depth intermingling of contemplation and the practice of Christian life, where the complexity of Trinitarian theology becomes a lived experience. The core of deific manifestation is predominantly Christocentric, which focuses on an entire set of issues pertaining to Christology. It explains the soteriological necessity for Christ's coming, including the decision of the Trinity to save humanity even before the creation of the world. *Theosis* highlights the pre-existence of the Logos prior to the Incarnation, Christ's full assumption of human nature, the imitation of Christ as an example of Christian life, and the regenerative way of his death, resurrection, and glorious ascension, where human nature became united to God forever. In its soteriological significance, *theosis* is also the explication of Christian anthropology that reflects on human constitution, mode of life, happiness, and has a teleological goal. The Christologically conveyed understanding of the church as the body of Christ is a deific explication. Christian faith in *theosis* is not simply presented as faith seeking understanding, but with emphasis on the vision of God and union with God, faith becomes the expression of understanding. *Theosis*, both on an individual and a universal level, is not shy in its eschatological perspective, either. *Theosis* not only addresses the restoration of harmony in our broken world, but is the testimony to a divine-human symphony and to salvific transformation on a cosmic scale. The testimony of *theosis* is a testimony of the inexplicable mystery of divine intimacy. In short, *theosis* speaks about how the transcendent God, who is beyond our understanding, becomes imminently and intimately involved in the life of his creation and why, and what to expect. We should also not discard the effect of the message of *theosis* as a pastoral tool. If, during the Middle Ages, to boost Christian commitment preachers often resorted to references to:

> the burning flames of hell, in patristic writers the attempt to enhance the devotional zeal for spiritual life and the commitment to Christ was carried out by no less shocking, but significantly more positively oriented, affirmations. Not eternal punishment as retribution for sinful life was emphasized, but rather eternal life in God, divine therapeutic forgiveness, and the restored harmony of the whole creation. Emphasis was placed not on what would

> happen to people if they did not obey the divine commandments, but rather on what awaits them if they reconcile themselves with God.[48]

Theosis is a message of salvation; it is a message of encouragement; it is a message of love; it is a message of reconciliation; it is a message of healing; and it is a message of ultimate happiness. Baptist theologians can easily engage *theosis* in the fields of systematic theology, historical theology, ethics, practical theology, and missiology. It is a powerful tool in addressing critical social issues, such as race, ethnicity, gender discrimination, inequality, corporate exploitation; most of all, it is a source of hope.

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[48] Kharlamov, 'Rhetorical Application of *Theosis*', pp. 127–128.

'This is love's prerogative, to give, and give, and give': Trinitarian Kenosis as a Model of Ministry

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Abstract: This essay explores kenosis as a fruitful theological category. If God is revealed in Jesus, and God is love, and God's love is Christ-like, then kenosis is a feature of the eternal communion of the Triune God. Using biblical and theological exegesis, and building on several stories, the essay examines Trinitarian, ecclesial and pastoral implications discernible when such kenotic love is applied constructively to key areas of human, social and ecclesial experience. Such areas as welcome and hospitality, reconciliation and peace-making, pastoral care and presence, generosity and gift, community and disability are illumined by the essay.

Key words: Kenosis; Love; Cross; Trinity; Gift; Community

In this paper I want to argue that kenosis is an essential theological category for understanding the nature of Divine love. If God is revealed in Jesus, and God is love, and God's love is Christ-like, then kenosis is not a marginal sidelight. It is the shining centre of the love of God incarnate in the life of Jesus, crucified for a broken world and resurrected in a power that remakes creation. The Colossian Christ of chapter 1 who made peace by the blood of the cross is also the one in whom all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell; is the same Kenotic Christ of Philippians 2 who became obedient unto death and only then is highly exalted; and that same Exalted Christ of Revelation 5, is the lamb slain in the midst of the throne, so that self-emptying love, not sovereign self assertive power, is what shall reign forever.

I have six stories to tell. These are important interludes in the theological exposition, and milestones to tell you how far we still have to go in this paper! These stories are not part of an argument; they are contributions to theological understanding that work in a quite different way. And these contain most of what I want to hint at as far as a pastoral spirituality of kenosis is concerned.

Kenotic Story 1: Doing the maths

Victoria is a bright, intelligent 15-year-old expected to do well at school. Except for maths. Last year at the parent's night it was made clear that Victoria's maths performance was so poor it would be unwise to present her for the GCSE. She and her parents were understandably taken aback but the

teacher was adamant—Victoria was rubbish at maths. No offer of learning support, no suggestion that the learning style might be different, and Victoria's self-confidence took a nose dive.

Her father is a well-known Professor of Law who requires a long envelope to accommodate his academic and professional qualification and is, by his own grinning admission, a likeable eccentric. He enrolled himself, Victoria, and Victoria's brother in night school and they studied together and sat the exam together. The results envelope was opened by Victoria who gained a credit pass, her brother a pass—and the professor now adds a GCSE maths to that long envelope. For a Professor of Law to spend a year at an FE College, in order to support and redeem his daughter's self-confidence, was an act of parental imagination, unlikely kindness, a disregarding of personal status, a process of disciplined self-emptying. In short, an act of kenosis.

I fully recognise kenosis, self emptying, is a contested idea, especially if it is made the primary interpretive category in Christology. But whether such primacy is claimed or not, kenosis seems to me indispensable as a way of exploring what we intend when we talk of the love of the Triune God. My own encounter with kenotic theology at its most persuasive is in the seminal work of W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*.[1] This slim, platinum-edged volume has shaped, inspired, and energised my ministry from the start. Vanstone's central thesis argues that all love is precarious, vulnerable, with no guaranteed outcomes, instinctively investing itself in the good of the other. The divine love is that in God which seeks the response of the beloved by reaching out in a way that is self-giving, conciliatory, and radically transformative of life's deepest relationships.

What I want to attempt is to explore self-emptying obedience as that eternal disposition of love that energises and characterises the intra-Trinitarian life of God, and thus to suggest that ministry within the community of Christ is kenotic and cruciform. Stephen Fowl makes precisely this point in his theological commentary on Phil 2:

> Christ reveals that God's power, indeed the triune nature, is made known to the world in the act of self-emptying. Self-emptying is not so much a single act as the fundamental disposition of the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. The incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus become the decisive revelation to us of that self-emptying that eternally characterises the triune life of God.[2]

While Moltmann is the better known influence in contemporary appropriations of kenotic thought, the NT theologian Michael Gorman more

[1] William Hubert Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God*, Forward by H. A. Williams, rev. ed. (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2007).
[2] Stephen Fowl, *Philippians*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 96-97.

recently links kenosis to the cruciform shape of divine love. 'To be truly human is to be Christ-like, which is to be Godlike, which is to be kenotic and cruciform'.[3]

But in addition: If our best experiences of loving and being loved have some analogous reference to the Divine Love, however partial and limited, then just as important as theological principles are stories of human loving and caring that carry within them kenotic instincts of costly self-emptying. Such stories are themselves convincing evidence that human love need not be all-demanding passion tempted to self-centred and self-interested fulfilment. Human love can also express self-giving and self-emptying—indefatigable goodwill, persistent kindness, self-expending energy for the other, self-donation in emotional investment. Thus, self-emptying need not be a destructive habit of self-negation, but a life-enhancing pouring out of ourselves into the lives of others.

Kenosis as the eternal disposition of the Triune God, and that kenosis once for all revealed in Jesus as the cruciform shape of divine love, can be said to have analogous experience in those human acts and responses to others that are other-serving rather than self-serving. Kenosis can therefore provide a cruciform model of ministry, community building and human relationships through which the basin and the towel, the table and the cup, the open arms and outstretched hands of welcome, express the eternal reality of love's endeavour, love's expense.

Kenotic Story 2: Aching Arms and Love through Gritted Teeth.

Stanley Hauerwas shared a conference in Aberdeen with Jean Vanier. Hauerwas was as you'd expect, the intellectual equivalent of a truculent gunslinger; Vanier a combination of international peace-keeping force, gentle philosopher, and patient priest. "When I see a problem I see an enemy to be defeated, Jean sees a wound to be healed."

Hauerwas told of a first visit to a supported residence for people with learning difficulties. A young lad with Down's syndrome hurtled towards him, arms out, and threw himself into Hauerwas' arms. As Hauerwas lifted him up, the boy looked into his grizzled face, smiled, and settled happily in his arms. He was heavy. Hauerwas tells of being shown round the place, his arms beginning to ache, and then cramp, but he was determined not to put the boy down till he was finished. Eventually the guided tour was finished, and the lad was put down, and Hauerwas arms uncramped. But that child's trust, and the face that looked deep into Hauerwas eyes, shaped and directed him into an area of theological reflection and social theology he has inhabited since. And he remembers the aching arms, the near overwhelming need to put the child down,

[3] Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 39.

the thought processes that would have justified it—but he looks on that afternoon as one of the key theological insights of his life— aching muscles are the cost of loving, and a child's trust is a gift worth suffering for.

Such kenotic carrying of the other is described by John Oxenham,

> Love ever gives, forgives, outlives:
> And ever stands with open hands.
> And while it lives It gives.
> For this is love's prerogative:
> To give—and give—and give.[4]

The Four Loves and the Kenotic Love of God

The inner life of God is a spiritual communion of personal, relational, interactive love. God is love. Not God loves, *is* love. The divine life is an ontology of love, and a love greater than which cannot be conceived. But the semantics of love are limited in English—so following C.S. Lewis, we'll try to give more substantial content to this condensed credo, God is love. Lewis identifies four words that express distinct forms of relational commitment and mutual exchange—affection, friendship, Eros, agape.

Affection is emotional affinity, nearer to our experience of liking and being liked by; it is a recognition of that which is attractive and congenial in the other, in negative terms what is non-threatening and in positive terms that which is affirming. Affection need not be expressed in action to be genuine, and is perhaps that part of us that holds on to the other person across distance—but it needs recurring presence to sustain it, to keep it vivid and real. Affections come and go, transfer from one to another, are not always rooted in commitment to the other as who they are, and is a response which is sensitive and alert to reciprocal emotional benefit. Affection is both emotionally expressive and emotionally demanding; it gives as it receives, and is unlikely to go on giving unless it receives.

Yet there is that in affection which gives emotional content and colour to a relationship. At its best, affection is emotional identification with another; it is sympathy, a capacity to enter into solidarity with another person's experience.

Friendship is a much more practical and expressive form of relationship—there are underlying assumptions of commitment, support, and loyalty. 'Being there for' is a contemporary phrase that expresses much that lies at the heart of true friendship. Friendship incorporates affection as one

[4] A popular quote from a poem of John Oxenham (William Arthur Dunkerley [1852-1941]), *Selected Poems of John Oxenham*, ed. by Charles L. Wallis (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 84.

element, but it is defined more by the mutual enjoyment of the other's presence. The idea of 'best friend' is perhaps the highest expression of human companionship. But best friends can become an exclusive alliance, the presence of each other enjoyed at the cost of hospitality and welcome to others less privileged. There is potential for self-indulgence, self preservation, and a tendency to selfish and possessive inwardness in friendships which intentionally reserve loyalty and commitment to one other. Friendship when it is a virtue tends to be pluralist, hospitable to the presence of others, therefore plural; open to the approach of others, therefore enriched and informed, shaped and formed by others outside of the self. The person we recognise as a potential friend on a first meeting is most likely to become one. A capacity for friendship will mean that those moments of recognition are not limited by self-interested benefits; in the end friendship grows out of the hospitality and welcome of the heart, mutually offered and reciprocally enjoyed.

Eros is a form of love which has been degraded by the adjective erotic; the adjective itself is degraded by its association with sexual activity, itself degraded by being made synonymous with genital activity, further degraded by being made to serve addiction to orgasm. All of which is far removed from desire as attraction, as the recognition of beauty, as the hunger for presence, the awareness of one's own incompleteness. Eros need not be reduced to a selfish search for fulfilment within a relationship of human mutual self-giving, Eros is gift realised most fully in passionate exchange. Indeed, my own way of defining Christian marriage in moral terms is the lifelong exclusive and mutual exchange of sexual privilege within the promised permanence of covenant and communion.

There is that in Eros which accommodates affection and friendship; erotic attraction need not be devalued and degraded as a valid expression of human experience. It is when Eros is separated from relationship, when desire is not for the person and for their benefit, but for the person as my benefit; in other words, when Eros is the pursuit of my fulfilment it becomes an exercise in exploitation, dehumanisation, and has more to do with physical appetite than relational hunger. The desire of one human being for another, rooted in physiology and chemistry, but expressed in relational physicality humanised by a love both erotic and ethical, both sexual and moral, with implications both personal and social, is, in fact, a required and God-given instinct for human flourishing—and the two shall become one flesh. Eros requires, therefore, mutual responsiveness within an ethically responsible freedom, and a commitment to the good of the other. It was Brunner who spoke of the irrevocability of the sexual act, the ineradicable nature of sexual union, and in doing so identified precisely why promiscuity

is a sin. Promiscuity is eros as relational chaos; fidelity is eros as mutual, exclusive gift. Seduction is erotic desire used to subvert the other's freedom and value; love is erotic desire used as a vehicle for that intimacy which is free gift.

Agape is different from affection, friendship and eros, yet it includes elements of them all. Agape is an active seeking of the good of the other because of the value of the other. It is never dispassionate but it is more than passion; it is never selfish because it is only possible when the interests of the self are relegated. It is a form of friendship because it recognises the importance of the presence of the other, and in its actions towards the other expresses commitment—but agape goes on loving whether or not there is a response.

Eros and agape have been opposed to each other in philosophy and theology, based on the clear distinction between eros as self-seeking and agape as self-giving. But is it not theologically possible that self-giving love, and a being whose nature *is* self-giving love, in the very act of self- giving is seeking the fulfilment of a self whose nature is generous gift, a giving away of the self for the sake of the other. In the life of the Triune God, the affirmation, 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever….' when interpreted with theological precision and exegetically rooted imagination, becomes a Trinitarian confession. The love of God, and the God who is love, seeks self-fulfilment in self-giving. Salvation is by the self-donation of the Son, willed by the Father, empowered by the Spirit.

And all this within the eternal exchange of love within the Trinity, the Triune God seeking beyond the divine life that which through the self- giving act of creation answers to the deepest realities of God's love, and that which through the self-giving act of the crucified God seeks and saves that beloved creation with a passionate longing that is eternal, divine, and self-expending. It is this vision of love, the love of the Triune God as creative and crucified, a dialectic of creativity and destruction, of life and death, of intimate communion and ultimate separation, of sovereign declaration, 'Let there be…', and suffering surrender, 'It is finished…'—it is that dialectic of creative crucified love that is woven into the texture of kenosis as Trinitarian love. Cruciform kenosis implies suffering and love, and suffering for the sake of the beloved.

Kenotic Story 3: Kenosis and the Trashed Television

In Scotland, children in trouble only appear in court for the most serious offences. The Children's Hearing System is an admired and long established alternative to the judicial system. A panel of trained lay people drawn from the local community, a legally qualified children's reporter, social workers, and

various relevant responsible persons from parents, to guardians, to teachers, meet to decide what is in the best interests of the child. It is called a hearing because in all the grown up speaking and procedures, the child is heard, and what the child wants is made to matter.

Amongst the most important people in a child's life when home and family breaks down, and the child needs a secure supported place, is the foster carer. At one panel hearing a lad of ten had trashed the carer's house for the umpteenth time. She had come to the end of the road; all her forgiveness reserves were exhausted. You can only claim so many TVs, windows, smashed doors, stolen mobiles on insurance. She was on her fourth TV. The only available option now would be secure accommodation. As chair of the panel I had to state the decision with legally defensible reasons, and a built-in provision for review. Like the X factor, the panel needs a majority, but it is best to have unanimity for such a serious decision. Just as we were confirming the decision, the foster carer interrupted and said, 'Ah want tae gie the boy anither chance'. A child's anger, fear, and loss of control encountered a person prepared once more to absorb the hurt, befriend, stay with, not walk away. That afternoon a kenotic theophany took place: a willing surrender of personal rights and self interest in order to redeem, restore, and help a child recover a sense of self-worth and discover the feeling of being wanted, of belonging. The cost to the foster carer is incalculable—as was the kenotic gift.

Referring to the cross as the hinge of history—what James Denney called the 'diamond pivot of reality',[5] John Howard Yoder speaks of the cross as the definitive theophany, the ultimate revelation of God:

> What happened on the cross is a revelation of the shape of what God is, and of what God does, in the total drama of history. [The apostles] affirm as a permanent pattern what in Jesus was a particular event. The eternal Word condescending to put himself at our mercy, the creative power behind the universe emptying itself, pouring out itself into the frail mould of humanity, has the same shape as Jesus. God has the same shape as Jesus, and he always has had. The cross is what creation is all about. What Jesus did was local, of course, because that is how serious and real our history is to God. But what the cross was locally is universally and always the divine nature.[6]

Agape, as the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the love God enables in the community of Christ; it takes the best of affection, friendship, and eros, and purifies them of those distorting tendencies that are integral to human nature. In the life of the Triune God love is essentially, eternally, and energetically active and activating power, the endlessly creative initiative, the persistently imaginative compassion of a God who lives and moves and exists in the eternal exchange of a divine

[5] James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), p. 109.
[6] John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stiock, 1998), pp. 84-85.

communion that is not an exclusive friendship, nor an ephemeral affection, nor an exploitative eros. God is love: persistently unfailing in **affection**, present and faithful in **friendship**, passionate in an unselfish desire for **intimacy**, and given to his creation in the self-expenditure of creative and crucified love as the **agape** of God.

The link between God's creativity and cruciformity, between creation and redemption, between love and self-expenditure, is memorably captured in the poetry of R S Thomas. In *The Musician,* the poet recalls attending a concert given by the great violinist Fritz Kreisler. Thomas has captured with heart-stopping poignancy the physical and psychic agony of the virtuoso soloist who pours himself out in the performance and gives himself utterly to the music. This is kenotic performance, the self-emptying of the artist, the crucifixion of the will for the sake of the music:

> A memory of Kreisler once:
> At some recital in this same city,
> The seats all taken, I found myself pushed
> On to the stage with a few others,
> So near that I could see the toil
> Of his face muscles, a pulse like a moth
> Fluttering under the fine skin,
> And the indelible veins of his smooth brow.
>
> I could see, too, the twitching of the fingers,
> Caught temporarily in art's neurosis,
> As we sat there or warmly applauded
> This player who so beautifully suffered
> For each of us upon his instrument.
>
> So it must have been on Calvary
> In the fiercer light of the thorns' halo:
> The men standing by and that one figure,
> The hands bleeding, the mind bruised but calm,
> Making such music as lives still.
> And no one daring to interrupt,
> Because it was himself that he played
> And closer than all of them the God listened.[7]

Divine Kenosis as the Perfection of the Four Loves

'This player who so beautifully suffered for each of us…' 'Because it was himself that he played'. The vulnerability of God in Christ is a paradox, a phrase on which many would want to conduct a theological risk assessment. Vanstone is careful in describing the divine love that surrenders its

[7] R.S. Thomas, *Collected Poems 1945-1990* (London: Dent, 1993), p. 104.

triumphant self-sufficiency and creates its own need. 'Of such a nature is the Kenosis of God—the self-emptying of Him who is already in every way fulfilled'.[8] There is that in the sovereignty of God that gives God freedom to define the extent and nature of that sovereignty, even in the self-limitation implied in self-emptying.

The concept of kenosis, expanded through an exploration of the semantics of human love, provides a fruitful way of reflecting on the nature of divine love, the meaning of the cross, and the implications of God's love as creative and crucified for our understanding of Christian community and ministry. Kenosis is more than an act of the Son in response to the will of the Father; kenosis is the eternal unselfishness of God, whose nature is self-expenditure for the sake of the Other. This essential and eternal kenosis, the mutual exchange of love and preference for the other, characterises the inner life of the Trinity. The self-giving love of Father, Son, and Spirit, the eternal loving kenosis of God, overflows in the love of the Triune God, united in creative purpose, bringing into being all that is in creation, and working in that same self-giving purposefulness for the redemption of creation by gratuitous, generous, inexplicable, and vulnerable love.

> To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one…It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.[9]

So love as kenotic response to the other implies self-emptying, self-giving, and the risk of hurt and loss for the sake of the other.

Kenotic Story 4: The Good Psychiatric Consultant

Dr. Jay (name changed) was an eminent psychiatric consultant and a remarkably successful befriender of his patients and their families. His area of specialist practice was bi-polar illness, a condition from which my mother suffered for two-thirds of her life. For ten years she was Dr. Jay's patient. On a number of occasions it was necessary for me to give consent for mum to be admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act. It was an exhausting, distressing, and guilt-inducing process. During one severe episode, mum would not let anyone in; her behaviour was erratic and her sense of self rapidly slipping from her, and the GP again felt the need to have her admitted to hospital against her will, but for her own safety. Dr. Jay arrived at her door, sixteen miles from the hospital, and spent nearly an hour talking with her through the letter box, reassuring her, talking her down, eventually persuading

[8] Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour*, p. 71.
[9] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 169.

her to let him in. A while later mum went to hospital reluctantly, but freely, and she and we were spared that emotionally-lacerating process of perceived betrayal and non-love. That dark, wet winter afternoon, Dr. Jay took upon him the form of a servant and emptied himself of status and emotional detachment—the first willingly became last, the consultant became friend, the doctor took upon himself the suffering of his patient.

The NT is full of the theological concept if not the terminology of kenosis. John 13 is an enacted parable of kenosis; and John's language of rising and kneeling, of basin and towel, of servant and served, and of love for the others is described in a kenotic prose poem. Phil. 2 is a theological narrative of kenosis and exaltation—but the one to whom knees bow is not the God who is full of himself, but the God who is self-emptied on the cross. Romans, for all its sonorous arguments, glints with the diamond light of eternal love bearing sin: 'God commends his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us…when we were God's enemies, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8, KJV). Chosen in him before creation, the redeemed creation has ever been in the heart of God, and the cost of reconciliation has ever been the eternal presupposition of God, the implicate of kenotic love, the chosen consequence of God's passion. N. Wolterstorff's son Eric was killed in a mountaineering accident.[10] Only in the abyss of his own suffering did he come to see and accept that God suffers. No one can see God's face and live—he had always thought that referred to God's splendour. Perhaps it means no one can see God's sorrow and live. And perhaps the sorrow is the splendour. Kenosis as self-emptying is always cruciform in the New Testament.

Thorvald Lorenzen has seen this clearly, that the splendour of God is revealed in the cross, and illumined by the resurrection. That is, the sorrow of God is not interminable but will be eclipsed by resurrection. But the truth remains—splendour through sorrow, life through death, renewal through loss, and the fulfilment of eternal purpose through eternal kenosis and the exaltation of love and life in resurrection splendour:

> The cross unmasks the world as the "world"—bereft of love and therefore of God, driven by selfishness, self-interest and violence. Where the "world" remained true to itself by forcing Jesus to the cross, God remained true to God's self. God, being love, identified with the victim, took the crucified one into God's own being, and thereby created new life out of death. The violence of the world was transfigured into a new ontology; the ontology of justice. That means that at the centre of life, in the foundation of being, there is not nothing, but

[10] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 81.

> God; there is not violence but non-violence; there is not war but peace; there is not hatred but love.[11]

The taking of the crucified one into the very being of God is a bold statement of what the love of God is: solidarity with the victim, embrace of the rejected, non-abandonment of the beloved to the grave. The death of the Son is the bereavement of the Father; the surrender of Christ, in the power of the Spirit, in Gethsemane and on Calvary, is the culminating work of the Son in obedience to the Father. The cry, 'It is finished' (Jn. 19:30), is the divine unity knowing in history and experience the final consequences of sin for One in whom holiness and wholeness are of his essential being. The cry of dereliction is the cry of separation and abandonment, torn from the heart of the Son, tearing the heart of the Father, as God knows in Spirit and in truth in the Holy of Holies that is the heart of God, the power of sin to tear the very fabric of love apart, and the power of love to absorb and transmute hate into love, evil into good, shame into glory and non-being into new creation. The cry of dereliction gives voice to the cost of kenotic love, and 'bespeaks the human life of God whose chiefest glory consists in a voluntary descent from depth to depth of our experience'.[12] 'Not diminished but rather fulfilled through self-limitation, God stoops to endure and thus to heal and conquer the most broken, terminal conditions of the human tragedy, the union of the eternal with perishability….'[13]

The cross then, is the pivotal point of all history, including the history of God. If the cross is decisive in the revelation of God, the diamond pivot on which all reality turns, the place where God is revealed in unarguable finality and in the utter reality of divine love, mercy, and judgement; if the cross is that which Christians are to know before all else, above all else, then it is at that place of kenotic cruciform self-emptying that the nature of God and the inner centre of God's eternal purposes are most accessible to human thought and experience. And there Wolterstorff's insight glows with truth—the sorrow is the splendour.

> Morning glory, starlit sky,
> soaring music, scholar's truth,
> flight of swallows, autumn leaves,
> memory's treasure, grace of youth:
>
> Open are the gifts of God,
> gifts of love to mind and sense;

[11] Thorvald Lorenzen, *Resurrection, Discipleship, Justice* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2003), pp. 79-80.
[12] H. R. Mackintosh, quoted in Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 173.
[13] Ibid.

hidden is love's agony,
love's endeavor, love's expense.

Love that gives, gives ever more,
gives with zeal, with eager hands,
spares not, keeps not, all outpours,
ventures all its all expends.

Drained is love in making full,
bound in setting others free,
poor in making many rich,
weak in giving power to be.

Therefore he who shows us God
helpless hangs upon the tree;
and the nails and crown of thorns
tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God: no monarch he,
throned in easy state to reign;
here is God, whose arms of love
aching, spent, the world sustain.[14]

While the cross is the fulcrum of kenotic love, the incarnation begins the great historic enactment of kenosis, the hinge of history…and the Word became flesh. It is captured in some of the greatest poetry in the language:

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span;
Summer in winter; day in night;
Heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great little one, whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heav'n to earth.[15]

Charles Wesley was entirely at home with theological paradox: the theological concept of a self-emptying God was fairly straightforward to a mind at ease with paradox and oxymoron. He brings the eternal triune life of God into relation with an historic incarnation without embarrassment: 'Being's source begins to be, And God himself is born!'[16] This is the nativity hymn as systematic theology. In his atonement theology Wesley comes very close to Moltmann's concerns to take with utmost theological seriousness the passionate entanglement of God in the sin and salvation of the world. 'Impassive he suffers, Immortal he dies',[17] is a Wesleyan couplet that rehearses the concept of the crucified God two centuries earlier. And in an

[14] 'Morning Glory, Starlit Sky', *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 194, text W. H. Vanstone.
[15] Richard Crashaw, The Full Chorus, in 'The Holy Nativity of Our Lord God: A Hymn Sung as by Shepherds', available at http://shakespeareauthorship.com/xmas/crashaw.html, accessed on 08 March 2015.
[16] Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1962), p. 56.
[17] J. R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 231.

extended meditation entitled 'Victim Divine', he uses one of his favourite oxymorons—how can the omnipotent be a victim? How can almighty power be powerless? How can Being's source begin to be, (incarnation) and then cease to be (crucifixion) and then come to be again (resurrection)? Who knows? But he finds at least part of the answer in the kenosis of Christ:

> He left his Father's throne above
> So free, so infinite his grace;
> Emptied himself of all but love,
> And bled for Adam's helpless race.
> …….

And then he recommends an act of intellectual kenosis to over-zealous theologians

> 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
> Who can explain his strange design.
> In vain the first-born seraph tries,
> to sound the depths of love divine!
> 'Tis mercy all, let earth adore,
> let angel minds enquire no more.[18]

There are limits to systematic theology and the search for intellectual coherence. If angels hesitate, we probably shouldn't rush in with precipitate clarifications.

Kenotic Story 5: Equilateral Triangle

A three-year-old child was unable to reproduce and enunciate sounds to form words. The speech therapist began by gently encouraging one vowel sound, then two, and to differentiate. Over some years, twice a week, they would meet and practice and slowly build sounds. Then consonants and vowels became short words, then syllables, then simple phrases. Years passed. The little girl was slowly building vocabulary, beginning to construct simple two- and three-word sentences.

This summer the girl was ten years old and had her last formal session with Christine, her speech therapist. And this summer she stood in front of her school assembly and enunciated clearly, 'equilateral triangle'.

But Moltmann is in good company in his insistence that the historical events of incarnation and crucifixion, of resurrection and Pentecost, be taken

[18] Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be that I Should Gain," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tenn.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), hymn No. 363; available also on e-net http://www.hymnary.org/hymn/UMH/page/368, accessed on 10 April 2015.

with ultimate theological seriousness as real events, as life-changing events, in the life of God.[19] When Moltmann uses theologically slippery terms such as 'the experience of God' and the 'History of the Triune God', he believes he is correcting a theological distortion. In its approach to God's redemptive activity and God's redeeming nature, classical Western theology is concerned to preserve the otherness, the transcendence, the impassibility and immutability of God.

For Moltmann's view this goes against the clear revelation in Christ, of God coming near to us in human form. Moltmann is suspicious of theologies that arise from within a dominant culture of power, privilege, and political Western intellectual assumptions, theologies which are much more protective of the full significance of the name that is above every name to which every knee shall bow, than to the clear theological limitations of such power embedded in the affirmation, 'did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil. 2:6b-8, ESV).The name above every name is not exalted through power or for the purposes of power; it is exalted precisely as the name of love, as the name of the self-emptying obedience of God in Jesus, in the sphere of human history, as a revelation of who and what God ultimately is.

Kenotic Story 6: Christology in Carmunock

There is a coffee shop in Carmunock that for some years was our regular Saturday morning escape from the real world. Homemade cherry or apple and cinnamon scones, a cappuccino, the paper, and the menace and tedium of the world receded. One day two people came in who had impairment of hearing, sight, and speech. I realized this as they communicated by hand touching in a version of Makaton.

The waitress who served them we knew by name—we are regulars there. She, too, engaged in sign and touch language communication, went away and came back with the tray carrying their order. So far as I know, Makaton and other alternative communication techniques aren't part of customer service in a coffee shop.

I asked as we left how she had learned to do this. Two years earlier the couple had come in and they had difficulty ordering their food. They showed her the charts and sheets and she spent much of the winter evenings practising the basics, and with their help in a few weeks she was picking it up. Now she is proficient in sign and touch language and unselfconscious as she greets them, takes their order, and serves them.

[19] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1981), pp. 42-43, 56, 118. See especially Ch. V.

What does it take for a twenty-year-old student to spend time in the evening and at her work learning to communicate in a language not her own? What is happening when she relinquishes her own voice, chooses to not use words, intentionally disempowers herself in order to empower others? She did not count her own ability to speak a thing to be grasped, but emptied herself—she became as those with whom she would communicate—she accommodated to their presence, learned to speak and hear on their terms. This is kenosis, the self-emptying that is only possible when love and welcome coincide.

Conclusion

The cross, then, that historical pinpoint of kenosis, reveals the self-emptying of the Son in the giving of his life; the self-emptying of the Father in suffering the suffering of the Son; and the self-emptying of the Spirit, whose passive non-intervention as the power of God at Calvary is God's 'Amen', the determined, and pre-determined 'Yes' of God to the personal cost of redeeming a fallen creation, a perichoresis of suffering love. And the triumph of Jesus, and why the name is above every name, is the triumph of love, redemption overcoming fall, death swallowed up in life, creation re-created through the creative suffering of God.

> God is the one who knows how to die and knows that in accepting death there is life, and life only through accepting death... God IS the event of self-surrender itself. That self abandonment, sustaining opposition and negation through sin's increase, is, in its very impotence, what releases the more abundant increase still of grace, the heightening overflow of divine being which is more present than absent in the midst of godforsakenness and godlessness, which outflanks sin, leaves hate exhausted, and secures the death of death, the negation of non-being.[20]

God is love. In speaking of the kenotic love of God are we able to speak of the **affection** of God? Only if we recognise the unconditioned faithfulness and constancy of the God who in Jesus clearly and joyously, makes himself present in the company of sinners, like us. In speaking of the kenotic love of God, can we speak of God's **friendship**? Yes, if we recognise that the faithful loyalty of God to me, to us, is not a theological justification for us dismissing others whom we define out of the friendship of God. And **eros**—does that powerful drive and desire for union and communion have a corresponding passion in the kenotic love of God? God's passionate love for his creation in the great historic act of self-giving in Christ reveals the eternal heart of God, the way God is, and who God is, seeking communion with his creation through the self-limitation that can alone make possible fellowship

[20] Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 255.

between creator and creature, between the eternal and the time-bound, between the divine and the human.

> The kenosis of Golgotha is grounded in the eternal mutual kenosis of the divine persons, and as such has a new, eventful significance even for God; it is a particular, actual unfolding of the infinite possibilities inherent in the Trinitarian relationality.[21]

And **agape**—in human terms persistent goodwill to the other, a willingness to put the interests of others before the interests of self? And here kenosis should be given serious consideration as an attempted explication of the finally inexplicable love of God.

Agape, the eternally inexhaustible benevolence of God towards his creation, is most fully and finally expressed as self-giving, in the birth of Jesus and His obedience unto death, even death on the cross. But if the cross reveals the **agape** of God as self-giving, it reveals also the passionate **desire** of God for a reconciled creation. And yes, it reveals the lengths to which God will go in **affectionate** solidarity with humanity in our lostness, and in doing so the cross reveals the faithful **friendship** of God for all that he has made, because God is love, and at cost beyond calculation the crucified God 'empties himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race'. So God fulfils God's purpose and nature in the kenosis of eternal self-giving love when within the communion of the Triune God, love ever reaches out in creation, and because divine love would never forsake or abandon that creation though fallen, love reached out again in reconciling and renovating love.

> Praise to the Holiest in the height,
> And in the depth be praise;
> In all His words most wonderful,
> Most sure in all His ways.
>
> O loving wisdom of our God!
> When all was sin and shame,
> A second Adam to the fight
> And to the rescue came.
>
> O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
> Which did in Adam fail,
> Should strive afresh against the foe,
> Should strive and should prevail.

[21] Mark McIntosh, 'Von Balthasar', in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 391.

And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's Presence and His very Self,
And Essence all divine.[22]

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[22] John H. Newman's hymn available at http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/p/r/praiseto.htm, accessed on 08 March 2015.

This City is Under Construction

Daniel R. Karistai

Abstract: This essay identifies some of the key shifts from modernity to post-modernity with special reference to the city and the church by examining the major works of theologians Harvey Cox and Graham Ward. The first part tracks the evolution of Harvey Cox's argument for secularisation as an instrument of positive cultural transformation over the past fifty years, since *The Secular City* was originally published. The second part examines two questions Graham Ward spends a considerable amount of time working on: 'How do cultures change?' and 'What time is it?' The point of this study will not be to arrive to concrete answers to these questions but to point to the vacuous nature of the post-modern condition and suggest this as an important starting point for the church to inhabit the post-modern city.

Key Words: Harvey Cox, Graham Ward, Cultural Transformation, Post-modernity, Post-Democracy, Post-materialism

> 'We need to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares'.[1]

Introduction

The city is always under construction; always transforming. From rebuilding roads to the construction of new high rise condominiums in a neighbourhood that will soon gentrify, the city is being replaced bit by bit in perpetuity. To the point where those who ask the question, 'What does the city say theologically?" invariably rub up against a form of the paradox of Theseus' Ship.[2] That is, if all the city's components are replaced or rebuilt over time does it remain the same city? If we could take the entire infrastructure which has been replaced in the city, arrange it all in the same way as the city under construction and place these two cities next to one another, would they be the same? It is the presupposition of this essay that the answer is no. The two cities are not the same. To be sure, they may

[1] Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* (USCOB, 2013), Ch. 2, paragraph 71.
[2] Plutarch, *Theseus*. The Internet Classics Archive, http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/theseus.html, Retrieved 28 Feb. 2015.

remain at the same geographical location and retain the same name on the map but, over time, the soul of the city changes. The primary aim of this essay is cartographical, to track some of these changes and try to identify what the city is transforming into. Or, as the quote above suggests, taking 'a contemplative gaze' upon the postmodern city and discovering where God is possibly dwelling.

The city this essay is written in particular reference to is New Orleans, my city. Originally New Orleans was built to reify the central ideals borne out of the Enlightenment, 'The original city's layout is almost a textbook example of the Enlightenment mania for balance, order, and clarity'.[3] Although modernity's relics of the public square are still obvious, over the last hundred years New Orleans has transitioned from a modern city to a post-modern one, from a colony to a tourist city. Rather than the rugged individual pursuing his or her own manifest destiny, the tourist visits and consumes what the city has to offer. In this way, if modernity promised freedom and order, the promise of post-modernity is the satisfaction of desire. A promise New Orleans is notorious for making. It does not matter if the tourist desires good food or drink, to see historical sites, or even drugs and sex, New Orleans has it all for the right price. But what about those that remain in the city long after the tourist leaves for his or her next destination? What about those consumed by the city's relentless manufacturing of desire? What about those caught up in the underbelly of this city, who are addled by addiction, incarcerated, unable to adapt to the migratory labour patterns of Late Capitalism and live in constant vulnerability to the next storm that may hit? These are the people whom the promises of modernity and post-modernity have deeply disappointed.

These are the questions this essay has in mind and it recognises that there is not just one problem in the city but the problems are legion. Cultural transformation is both needed and continues to happen with or without the church. The church today, in many ways, is unsure of where it belongs or is unsatisfied with its relegation to the sphere of people's private lives. We do not know how to name the nature of the city's cultural condition outside of the negative. For lack of positive identification we call it 'post-modern'. Through the major works of Harvey Cox and Graham Ward this essay seeks to track some of the key shifts made from the modern to the post-modern city with special reference to the church's location.

[3] Lawrence N Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 69-70.

Harvey Cox

This section is going to be a diachronic study of Harvey Cox's work with two particular focal points in mind: the phenomenology of freedom which the secularisation of the city promised and the location of the church within the Secularised City. This study will begin with Cox's original work, *The Secular City,* where he not only set up his vision for the secularised city but also argued for where the church ought to be located once it embraces this process. The next work that will be examined is *Religion in the Secular City*. In this text Cox makes three interesting concessions. One, religion did not disappear in the city in spite of secularisation's advances. Rather, religion made a dramatic resurgence into the public square. Two, modernity failed to be a vehicle for liberation and cultural transformation and became the very machine which caused oppression. Three, rather than being 'God's avant-garde', the church became something more akin to a chapel in an airport. Even with these three concessions he maintains the hope potential secularisation has for cultural transformation. Finally, this essay will turn to a reprint of *The Secular City* in 2013 in which Cox wrote a new introduction. In this introduction Cox responds to some primary critiques there have been over the years while offering a fresh perspective on the future of secularisation. This section will conclude with some lingering questions of Cox's argument, some points of critique, and the problem that remains, that is, identifying the post-secular city for what it is.

Secularisation and Cultural Transformation

There are three points of interest in *The Secular City*: the biblical foundations of secularisation, the phenomenology of freedom in the Secular City, and the location of the church. Cox contends that secularisation[4] has its origins in scripture and is an 'authentic consequence of biblical faith'.[5] He draws from the creation account in Genesis[6], the Exodus story[7], and the covenant YHWH made with His people at Sinai[8] to highlight three major pillars of a secular worldview: disenchantment of nature, de-sacralisation of politics, and the de-consecration of values. For Cox, these are the ingredients necessary for the creation of a secular culture and his basic argument in this section is that the church can find stories within Scripture that support the advancement of secularisation.

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[4] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965). Cox uses these two terms in a technical way: 'Secularization is a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views' whereas secularism presents a 'new closed worldview' (Cox 1965, pp. 18-21).
[5] Ibid., p. 18.
[6] Ibid., pp. 21-24.
[7] Ibid., pp. 25-30.
[8] Ibid., pp. 30-36.

The second part of his argument is what I describe as a 'phenomenology of freedom'. How does the liberated person experience freedom in the secularised city? In the chapter titled 'The Shape of the Secular City' Cox identifies two ways in which the person experiences freedom in the secular city. First, there is freedom to be found in the anonymity that a metropolis provides. The foil Cox returns to throughout this book is the image of the small town. In regards to anonymity, the small town is a 'restricted web of relationships'[9], a 'fish bowl'[10] and a Petri dish for gossip. The small town dweller, essentially, has no privacy (because everyone knows each other's business). He or she has no control over which relationships he or she can have and no choice on who to share more intimate details of his or her life with. The urban dweller, however, not only has the ability to be anonymous but he or she *must* maintain a certain level of anonymity within relationships as a matter of survival in the city.[11] The urban life must be this way because we do not have the capacity to be intimate with every person we interact with during our day. Anonymity means that the person is no longer bound to being in relationships with those in nearest proximity and can choose whom to have more intimate relationships with based upon affinity. The choice in being able to preserve a private life represents how we are able to experience the height of human freedom and ought to be embraced as one who has been delivered from the Law after receiving the gospel. Anonymity in and of itself is an expression of a much deeper human need the Secular City promises to meet. Mobility is the other expression of freedom for the city's shape. Cox argues that there is a direct relationship between mobility, urbanisation and social change. Mobility has been the engine for social change which has resulted in a new political condition where we, regardless of gender and skin colour, are free to vote for our civic leaders, what school to attend, or what restaurant to go to.[12] Cox's phenomenology of freedom circles around the concept of choice. There is great freedom in maintaining anonymity because it enables the person to keep a private life separate from public.[13] Mobility is also liberating because it both allows the person to make their life better (socially and economically) and increases the available choices to the person exponentially. The Secular City not only makes the experience of anonymity and mobility possible, it cultivates these experiences as a part of secularisation as a historical process. Where, then, can we find the church in a city that seeks to be freed from her religious trappings?

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[9] Ibid., p. 46.
[10] Ibid., p. 47.
[11] Ibid., p. 44.
[12] Ibid., pp. 52-53.
[13] Ibid., p. 41.

Cox evokes two different images to describe the character of the church in the secular city as well as her location: God's avant-garde and the city's cultural exorcist. To the former, the very nature of an avant-garde is unpredictable, spontaneous, and unorthodox in style. Cox argues that the church must adopt Jesus' vision for his own ministry in order to capture Cox's avant-garde vision. He prescribes three different modes of ministry: kerygmatic, diakonic and koinoniac.[14] Briefly, the kerygma of the church is 'that the One who frees slaves and summons men to maturity is still in business'. The kerygmatic function of the church is to speak truth to powers and give hope to the powerless that they are not doomed to the situation they are currently in. The diakonic function is performed when the church asks, 'What are the major cleavages in the age of the secular city? Where is healing going on?'[15] The church is called to be servant to all and work towards cultural reconciliation between fractured communities. Finally, the koinoniac function is to make tangible the realities the church's message and ministry points to. In this function the church is 'to show what the signs of the Kingdom are: harbingers of the reality which is breaking into history not from the past but from the future'.[16] These three functions require of the church the ability to improvise and adapt to shifting cultural situations. When the church is faithful to the task, she becomes God's avant-garde.

The other is the Church as Cultural Exorcist. In an effort to make the image of Jesus as an exorcist more palatable to the modern mind Cox deconstructs exorcism along anthropological and psychoanalytic lines summing it up to an aspect of a 'magical society' deeply entrenched in an enchanted worldview. Jesus was bound by the 'neurotic constrictions' within his culture that still held onto magical and superstitious worldviews. His ministry of exorcism was one that sought to liberate individuals into secularised maturity.[17] The task of the church in the secular city is in confronting the 'massive residues of magical and superstitious worldviews' that are a remainder from the transition of the small town to the city. If this is the ministry of a cultural exorcist, then it tells us where the church is located in the Secular City.

Modernity's bifurcation between science and religion is analogous to the difference between small town and city that Cox argued for. The church as cultural exorcist is a church that vacillates between small town and city much as Jesus did between a magical society and 'reality'. The church is no longer a part of the city's centre but is located on the margins of

[14] Ibid., pp. 128-135. The rest of this paragraph summarises the argument found in these pages.
[15] Ibid., p. 140.
[16] Ibid., p. 147.
[17] Ibid., pp. 150-153.

enlightened civilisation and making appearances only when called upon to liberate those who need conversion. The space Cox envisions for the avant-garde/cultural exorcist church to inhabit is on the periphery of the city, with no formal organisation and with the sole purpose of serving the city's agenda.[18]

This prospect is exciting for Cox because he anticipates that there will always be 'mythical meanings that obscure the realities of life and hinder human action' that will need to be cast out.[19] While the church may not enjoy the centre of the city as it once did, it will still be where the action is and will be a part of humanity's liberation. Secularisation is the process in which culture individuates itself from religious determination and integration. The church should embrace secularisation and understand how this process is evident in Scripture. For Scripture contains within it narratives that teach us how God liberated us into a Promised Land which is free from magic, theocracy, and hegemony. This place is what Cox calls the Secular City. The form that the church will take after it has been secularised will be a decentralised, improvisational community of people whose function within the city is to be agents of conversion by leading people into this Promised Land.

(A Resilient) Religion in the Secular City

Twenty years after *The Secular City* was published Cox released his sequel titled *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* where he engages with several different ways religion had responded to secularisation since his first book came out. There are three main points that I want to draw out from this book. One, the implicit premise of the book is that his (and modernity's) expectation for religion was disappointed. In his words, 'Rather than an age of rampant secularisation and religious decline, it appears to be more of an era of religious revival and the return of the sacral'.[20] Religion did not go anywhere in spite of the rising secular tide that Cox had observed in his earlier book. The other two points are more acute and this is where the attention will be focused on for this section.

The second point is how secularisation failed to be an instrument of liberation for the oppressed. In his examination of liberation theology he wrote, 'The failure of modern theology is that it continues to supply plausible answers to questions that fewer and fewer people are asking, and inadvertently perpetuates the social bases of oppression'.[21] For liberation

[18] Ibid., p. 236.
[19] Ibid., p. 162.
[20] Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 20.
[21] Ibid., p. 159.

theology the question turned from an epistemic belief to matters of exploitation. In this chapter Cox exposes the systemic oppression that resided in the Enlightenment's blind spot by using John Stuart Mill as an example.[22] In his work *On Liberty,* Mill certainly advocated for the individual's autonomy from a tyrannical state but this freedom was not meant to be extended toward children and the barbarian. Children must be under some form of tutelage until they become adults and since 'barbarian' means to be unenlightened this set of people does not have the capacity to flourish within any sort of social contract; they must have a ruler. Mill's ideas paired with a politicised version of Darwin's theory of evolution provided the justification that the newly emancipated European nation states needed to assert their own domination and, consequently, to perpetuate the oppression secularisation was meant to liberate.[23]

The final point has to do with the actual character and location of the church within a secularised construct. Cox points out that if an airport can be seen as 'modernity incarnate'[24] then the church would be a chapel inside. He describes it as a 'niche thoughtfully set aside for the divine . . . almost chic, trying its best not to look too anachronistic'.[25] To say this church exists on the margins would not be completely accurate because this church is too sanitary to fit within the same genre of the church 'from below'. This modern church that Cox describes has been inoculated, 'cured' of any sort of trait that would subvert the secularised status quo. It is allowed by the secular powers to remain but its function is ornamental. The space the chapel is allowed to inhabit is dictated by those who run the airport. The chapel can perform its religious services but it cannot stand out. Its aesthetic must be the same as the fast food restaurant, coffee shop, and convenience store that share the same terminal. This existence is a far cry from the church as an avant-garde or cultural exorcist that Cox envisioned.

The Secular City: Revisited

In 2013 Princeton University Press reprinted *The Secular City* and included an entirely new introduction by Cox. In this introduction he gave three key explanations on why the secularisation he had posited nearly fifty years ago had failed to live up to its promise. First, he readily recognised that religion hadn't disappeared but rather it 'migrated into the economy'.[26] International banks have now become our temples filled with mystery. Economists are the theologians that invent new symbols and tell new

[22] Ibid., p. 160. The following summarises the argument Cox lays out.
[23] Ibid., p. 161.
[24] Ibid., p. 184.
[25] Cox 1984, p. 185.
[26] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. xxi.

stories which explain how 'the market god' can save us.[27] His point being that Western devotion to capitalism has some stark comparisons with the religious devotion that Modernity attempted to snuff out. Second, the 'progress-equals-Westernisation-equals-secularism' had been severely disappointed in light of the twentieth century's gulags and holocausts. The final piece of secularisation's failure has to do with its capitulation into secularism. He argued:

> The unfortunate fact is that the liberating potential of secularization…is now hoist upon its own petard by the relentless promotion of the ideology of secular*ism* with its myopic vision of unending progress under the tutelage of modern (read "Western") civilization.[28]

In the aftermath of such disappointment and soured optimism Cox offers a way for secularisation to regain its distinction from the 'ism' it became bedfellows with. That is, to create a 'theology of the secular'[29] or, another way to put it, to secularise secularism. In a similar fashion to other religions embracing pluralism and accepting 'the existence of a variety of spiritual traditions…as a gift and opportunity'[30] it is possible for advocates of secularism to open up their closed ideology. It would be wrong, though, to suggest that this is a change in his position. In the final comments of his most recent introduction he wrote of the need for 'post-modern' theologies to incorporate its 'modern liberal legacy' in order to pass through the secular city and reach what is on the other side. For Cox there is nothing inherently wrong with secularisation-as-worldview, but where the movement ultimately went astray was when it capitulated into secularism, a closed ideology. This continued defence of secularisation begs the question; what is there to prevent this meta-secularisation from capitulating into another form of secularism? For Harvey Cox, it seems, rather than turtles, the answer is secularisation all the way down.

Graham Ward

At this point I am going to turn to my other interlocutor, Graham Ward. This first section begins with the question of cultural transformation and works through some of the mechanics of how culture changes.[31] I have broken his argument down into three primary headings that are most relevant to this project. The first is about cultural hermeneutics, the interpretation of culture from what he calls 'standpoint epistemology'. The

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., pp. xxvii-xxix.
[29] Ibid., p. xxxv.
[30] Ibid., p. xxxiv.
[31] Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

second is concerned with the question, 'How do we get to where we are trying to go?' The key concepts for the 'how' will be cultural 'pro-jection' and the recognition of 'community and difference'. The final heading will be what it means to succeed in transforming a culture. Section two will be about locating the church within the 'post-modern' city. This study will map out his genealogy of religion from pre-modern to post-modern culture.[32] The final question, 'What time is it?' will return to the vacuous nature of the 'post-modern' and 'post-secular' descriptors of our current condition.

Cultural Transformation

Graham Ward asks how cultures, or 'the public perception of reality', change?[33] In respect to Christianity, although not exclusively, 'How does the theological project become a transformative public practice with respect to the cultures that contextualize it?'[34] The answer to these questions begins with cultural hermeneutics. Cultural hermeneutics is a complex interplay between critical reflection, production and re-articulation of what it produces.[35] It is concerned with 'the concrete reality of others' and 'examines the relational responsibility to another'.[36] As such, cultural hermeneutics is implicated in the culture it is reflecting upon. There is no objective or innocent position to be critical from; it is an engagement from within the cultural production.[37] What, then, is being produced? Using the overarching term 'story', he contends that it is the 'beliefs, concepts and values constituting a culture' that are produced.[38] These cultural productions involve the 'formation of persons and their self-understanding and self-evaluation'.[39] This also involves a particular kind of epistemology, 'Standpoint Epistemology'.[40] Before shifting focus to that subject, I want to address one final aspect of cultural hermeneutics: culture is transformed through the rehearsal and re-articulation of its narratives. Ward argues that, 'any critique is an internal reflection within an ongoing process of transformation that issues from/in reading, citing, reciting and interpreting various cultural activities'.[41] Critical reflection creates inflections or 'micro-modifications'[42] of the narratives being rehearsed. Over time transformation happens. The process of cultural hermeneutics is this:

[32] Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) .
[33] Ward 2005, p. 61.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., pp. 72-73.
[36] Ibid., p. 65.
[37] Ibid., p. 72.
[38] Ibid., p. 65.
[39] Ibid., p. 63.
[40] Ibid., pp. 72-85.
[41] Ibid., p. 63.
[42] Ibid.

critical reflection begets the reproduction of cultural mores, traditions and beliefs which necessarily involves interpretation qua engagement. As a culture engages with its own production and rehearses its own narratives, transformation takes place.

Cultural hermeneutics operates from a particular standpoint, '…a shared knowledge; an understanding of the world that, in being articulated, is recognised and held to be a better account of the world than others available'.[43] It is not a position of a single individual[44] but is situated within a historical and cultural context 'belonging to a socio-linguistic community'.[45] The potency of standpoint epistemology lies in its ability 'to examine questions about power, politics and public truth' and the 'examination is itself a negotiation for the redistribution of power and its cultural productions'.[46] Standpoints offer an epistemological grounding for critical discourse and furnish what he calls 'pro-jects'.[47]

If a standpoint is the starting place for critical engagement then a 'pro-ject' is a direction for critical engagement to go.[48] It is an idealistic and necessary horizon for what a culture could become. It is necessary because 'any standpoint involves work. It is "achieved"…without the pedagogical hope of "achieving" critique is doomed to an arbitrary kicking against the dominant pricks'.[49] Furthermore, since pro-jects are inherently located in the future they are directly associated with Hegel's 'recognition'. It is a form of questioning and being questioned.[50] The heart of recognition 'is social transformation that comes about by the positive evaluation of another position with respect to one's own'.[51] Recognition is also a form of response and a vehicle for cultural transformation.[52] Since identification is an inherent aspect of recognition it furnishes us with knowledge of 'difference and community'.[53] Recognition gives us the ability to identify our social affinities as well as the outsider. 'The economy of recognition bears the project towards its future' because it gives a culture the ability to identify what needs to be transformed.[54] The mechanics of cultural interpretation and transformation orbit standpoint epistemology, pro-jection and recognition. Cultural transformation starts from somewhere

[43] Ibid., p. 76.
[44] Ibid., p. 75.
[45] Ibid., p. 76.
[46] Ibid., p. 74.
[47] Ibid., pp. 88-89. The spelling is Ward's and he maintains it throughout the remainder of this book to differentiate from 'project'.
[48] Ibid., p. 89.
[49] Ibid., p. 88.
[50] Ibid., p. 90.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 89.
[54] Ibid., p. 90.

(standpoint), is heading somewhere else (pro-jection) and gets there via recognition. How do we know that we have arrived? It is a tricky question; pro-jections present a 'utopic horizon' where 'the whole is not yet'.[55] However, cultural axioms within our current condition and for what we want to become enables the community to create an internal metric for success and failure.[56]

The relationship between standpoint and pro-ject is not necessarily one- to-one. Nor is the relationship between pro-jects and cultural transformation. It is possible for a standpoint to furnish multiple pro-jects, some could even be contradictory. Also, a pro-ject could belong to more than one standpoint. A community can also have multiple standpoints and pro-jects. It is within this pluralist milieu where 'success' comes into play because it 'is an outcome of the economy of recognition'.[57] To engage with a culture hermeneutically means to tell a story from a particular standpoint that gives a better account for the questions the community's surrounding culture is asking.[58] Cultural transformation is, therefore, a politic of persuasion or *apologia*. 'Success here can be measured by an increase in credibility such that other standpoints sharing the same cultural axis…would be more persuaded of the correctness of one reading over another'.[59] If a community would seek to transform its surrounding culture, their neighbourhood for example, the community would engage in a type of apologetic discourse in an effort to persuade their neighbours to adopt the community's pro-ject as their own. As the community gains credibility via presenting the neighbourhood with a story that gives better answers to deep questions the neighbourhood is asking, transformation takes place.[60] This leads into the question, 'Where does transformation take place?'

The Unplottable Church

'What then is post-modernity but modernity enjoying its own pathological condition?'[61] It is an important question because the nature of 'post-modernity' is a contested subject. Ward understands post-modernity as the fullest actualisation of modernity. How this relates to the location of the church is that if modernity seeks to marginalise the church through the disenchantment of reality and the de-politicisation of religion, then post-modernity attempts to disappear the church through the re-enchantment of 'religion as special effect'[62] and the commodification and fetishisation of

[55] Ibid., pp. 87-89 and 134.
[56] Ibid., p. 91.
[57] Ibid., p. 104.
[58] Ibid., pp. 103-104.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 76.
[61] Ward 2003, p. 151. Cf. Ward 2003, p. 1.
[62] Ibid., p. 115.

religion. The latter flows out of the former and the purpose of this section is to exegete a genealogy of religion in post-modernity to help identify what about our culture needs transformation.[63]

Ward makes a few points about the renegotiation that occurred as culture shifted from pre-modernity to modernity that would be helpful to highlight. Most notably, in pre-modernity 'religion' was understood as a reality that encompassed the sacred and secular by liturgically organising time, social identity and space.[64] In this 'liturgical cosmos' the '*saeculum* had no autonomous existence... nothing remains separated from divine providence'.[65] The sacred and the secular were bound together by the sacramental worldview of the High Middle Ages at the end of the fifteenth century, and with the colonisation of the New World a secular world started to become 'unhinged from the sacred and liturgical cosmos'.[66] As the territorial expansion of the Christian world grew, so did the need to renegotiate the concept of 'religion' in order to differentiate Christianity as the true religion amongst a plurality of other pieties. Thus, the genus of Religion was born[67] and faith became 'understood as a set of doctrinal principles to be taught'.[68] This created a new space 'in which God's presence was only available through the eyes of faith…The understanding of secularity itself changed as such a space began to open'.[69] As the following centuries saw the Protestant Reformation, the so-called Wars of Religion, and the emergence of the nation state the shape and style of the sacred and secular spaces became what we now identify as characteristically modern. Religion became internalised, a matter of conscience and personal choice.[70] Concomitantly 'a profound secular space has now been conceived through the delineation of civil jurisdiction and power. The secular is now an independent, autonomous, neutral and objective space'.[71]

In reference to the modernist divide between public secular affairs, private religious matters, and the location of the church in the modern city Ward provides this commentary on the 1927 film *Metropolis:*

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[63] I qualify 'our culture' with the same sentiment as Ward in (Ward 2000, p. 261): 'I am more than aware these are not representative cities, if, indeed, any single city can be generically representative. I cannot speak for cities in Latin America, for example, on most of the African continent. I speak of Western European and North American cities specifically and that must severely qualify large statements about civic life in the opening of the third millennium'. I am writing of that which I am only familiar with; a Western, North American, capitalist milieu.
[64] Ward 2003, p. 18.
[65] Ibid., p. 22.
[66] Ibid., p. 37.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., pp. 22 and 41.
[69] Ibid., p. 22.
[70] Ibid., pp. 58 and 61.
[71] Ibid., p. 60.

> In *Metropolis*, there are many shots of chases and struggles on the roof of the great Cathedral, and along its buttressed walls. Important scenes are staged outside its doors, but we are never led inside. Inside is a private and secret domain…The Cathedral is a gothic anachronism in the futuristic city. It has no function. It is a shell, a theatrical backdrop against which civic action can be staged.[72]

This quote is useful for a couple of reasons. One is to capture the marginalisation of the church in the modern city. The interior life of the church remains just that, interior. Not only is its politic of reconciliation kept behind the gothic walls, but it is also supplanted by the social contract created by the 'patrician-capitalist and worker-citizen'[73] in order to resolve the plot's conflict. *Metropolis* reifies enlightenment soteriology via social contract and relegates the church to the domain of the citizen's private lives. The other reason is to highlight the relationship between the individual's freedom of choice, capitalist consumerism, and religion. If, returning to the initial question of this section, the pathological condition of modernity involves the individual's consumption, then enjoying said condition includes the commodification of religion. In post-modernity religion becomes a special effect, an aesthetic both saturated with symbols of the transcendent and liquidated of meaning.

'Religion as special effect'[74] begins with 'irreality'.[75] It is a virtualised,[76] mythological, and shallow representation of being[77] or, more accurately, an over-representation of being. Ward uses Baz Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet* to illustrate what irreality looks like in relation to religion. Luhrmann inundates the aesthetic of every major scene with Christian symbolism to the point of overkill.[78] While the characters and their environments are adorned with religious symbols and icons the meaning of these items has been eviscerated by the ecstatic, hallucinogenic violence that is equally present throughout the film. The religious symbols and icons are reduced to 'holy accessories and paraphernalia' in the same way Friar Lawrence is 'reduced to a perfunctory office'.[79] This reduction is a sign of the commodification of religion and is made tangible in two ways. One is to produce a transcendental experience for the consumer.[80] Transcendence is simulated in a highly controlled environment in order to immerse the customer in an experience where he or she can encounter the

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[72] Ibid., p. 36.
[73] Ibid., p. 32.
[74] Ibid., p. 115.
[75] Ibid., pp. 25-28 and 31-34.
[76] Ibid., p. 27.
[77] Ibid., p. 32.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., p. 121. Also, cf. Ward 2000, pp. 58-68 for what he calls the 'Disneyland-effect'.

extremes of emotion and adrenaline in safety.[81] The second way is the inversion of that transcendence into immanence where religious symbols utterly saturate the public square. The Christian can put his or her religion on display with their sense of fashion. Both the commodification of transcendental experience and the immanent reduction of religious symbolism point to a resurgence, or 'new visibility' of religion in the post-modern city.[82]

What does this new visibility tell us of the church's location in the city? The church is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. While membership and/or attendance in modern, mainstream protestant and catholic denominations have been in decline in the West, the post-modern church can be found holding worship services in a bar, coffee shop, movie theatre, or school gym. It is a church that is mobile as it has to set up and tear down its equipment and leave no trace of its presence within these establishments. If the condition of modernity was to relegate the church to a private, spiritual domain, then enjoying that condition can be found in this commodification of religion and the disappearance of any lasting presence the church has in the city. Ultimately, the post-modern church is unplottable in the city. Must it remain so? How can the church, both local and universal, resist its own disappearance by the economies of empire? The starting point for answering that question is to directly confront only what has been alluded to so far, that is, the apophatic nature of post-modernity. Graham Ward begins that confrontation by asking, 'What time is it?'

The Signs of the Times

This is 'the most difficult question Christian theology addresses' because it a question that concerns itself with the nature of God's relationship with the world. It is a question about history, salvation, and 'where we (presently) stand'. [83] The terms 'post-modernity'[84] and 'post-secular' are metonymic of where we stand, 'the use of [the prefix] 'post-' betrays something of a linguistic bankruptcy'.[85] 'Linguistic bankruptcy' is an

[81] Ibid.
[82] Cf. Graham Ward, *Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), pp. 131-135 and 147-158.
[83] Ward 2000, pp. 2-3. Parentheses are mine.
[84] Cf. Graham Ward, 'Where we Stand', in *The Blackwell Companion to Post-modern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. xxii-xxiii. In his introduction to this collection of essays he makes a distinction between 'post-modernity' as a cultural description and 'post-modernism' as the worldview in which post-modernity is situated: 'Postmodernism enables us to distinguish certain elements in our contemporary world which are other than postmodern and yet, all too often, can be lumped together as characteristics of postmodernity'. I have waited until now to point out this distinction because I have not found it to be useful for what I am doing in this essay. However, as with Cox's distinction between 'secularism' and 'secularisation', it is important to note.
[85] Ward 2009, pp. 154-155.

interesting way to put it. Epistemically we can only know the nature of the 'time' we are in by identifying how the ground upon which we stand has shifted. We are dependent upon interpreting metaphor or, to continue with Ward's vernacular, 'reading the signs of the times'.[86] Of the myriad of metaphors Ward has used in his *corpus* I have drawn out four that represent his understanding of the post-modern condition: 'City of Endless Desire', 'Late Capitalism', 'Post-materialism', and 'Post-democracy'. These will aid in identifying some key cultural spaces within the post-modern city that need to be transformed.

The 'city of endless desire' is a city where 'culture imitates culture'.[87] This is characterised by a movement beyond modernist individualism into an 'aesthetic paradigm in which masses of people come together in temporary emotional communities'.[88] These 'post-modern tribes' are constructs meant to heighten the individual's emotional experiences and, within the city, results in the dismemberment of the language of community and responsibility.[89] The city of endless desire is 'a city of profound godlessness; a city wedded to the ruthless pursuit of the present…the experience of degree zero'.[90] The social becomes cultural, a commodified representation of being.[91] The object of desire is replaced with desire itself. We are estranged from one another and yet bound together by the thrill of the chase. The commodification of emotion (and the transcendental experience) has created a market for 'late capitalism' to emerge.

Late capitalism contains three main characteristics. First is the decentralisation of manufactured goods[92] and the migration of the industrial complex within urban centres to Third World countries for cheaper production costs, including the exploitation of labour.[93] This migration has made 'super profits' possible.[94] It is also marked by, but not limited to, economic polarisation.[95] If, in this city, the economic demand is experiencing desire then the product is the satisfaction of desire.[96] What makes this condition of desire endless, however, is that not only does the market produce the supply for the demand but it also imputes more desire back into the citizens: 'The market turns us all into consumers who produce

[86] Ward 2000, pp. 20-21. Ward uses this phrase, or other variations, throughout.
[87] Ibid., p. 54.
[88] Ibid., p. 60.
[89] Ibid., p. 61.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p. 55.
[93] Ibid., pp. 57-58.
[94] Ibid., p. 55.
[95] Ibid., pp. 58-59. Cf. pp. 66-70 for examples of political and cultural polarisation.
[96] Ibid., p. 56.

only to afford to be more powerful consumers'.[97] Desire is both manufactured and consumed and the market exists to consume itself into oblivion.

The third metaphor Ward uses is what he dubs 'postmaterialism'. Drawing from the work of Ronald Inglehart, Ward furnishes this definition:

> As a people moves out of economic instability, where basic survivor values such as food and physical security dominate, their values change—orientated now toward quality-of-life issues such as human rights, personal liberties, community, aesthetic satisfaction, and the environment. It is these values that he designated as postmaterialist.[98]

Post-materialism is a point of view that is 'critical of a purely material understanding of objects, activities and values'.[99] This is closely linked to what he has called in an earlier work 'the re-enchantment of the world' where 'dignity is restored to the emotional and experiential', 'there is a new respect for what cannot be explained', and 'morality is re-personalised and no longer abstract…the community within which love is to circulate is particular'.[100] Second, post-materialism is marked by the technological revolution in the twentieth century where an individual's lifestyle becomes much more privatised.[101] Post-materialism is, at its core, a lifestyle of affluence and transcendent from the poverty the majority of the world is subject to.[102]

The final metaphor for post-modernity is what he calls 'post-democracy'.[103] Post-democracy is first signified by the media's domination of politics and its capacity to 'generate a particular political myth' that is based on the relationship between media moguls and the political party they are affiliated with.[104] The media has been commodified to where we can choose the brand of news that reinforces our own particular political values and worldview to the exclusion of other standpoints. Second, and related to what has already been discussed, the political sphere is dominated by economic questions 'such that the rise of global capitalism has produced a self-referential political class more concerned with forging

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Ward 2009, p. 81. See fn. 5 on page 81 for the collection of Inglehart's work Ward used to create this definition.
[99] Ibid., p. 33.
[100] Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 171.
[101] Ward 2009, p. 53. Cf. Ward 2000, pp. 225-260 for a more in-depth analysis of 'virtual reality'.
[102] Ward 2009, p. 82.
[103] Ward notes here that the 'postdemocratic' label is problematic because it assumes 'the stability of the modern concept of "democracy"…that democracy in the past was homogenous, stable and self-evident…' (Ibid., p. 73). If, in the West, democracy is the name of a process a culture seeks to become, then the following indicators are not 'post-' anything. Instead, they are an evolutionary product of democratic liberalism. The 'postdemocracy' label, then, is a tentative one.
[104] Ibid., p. 67.

links with wealthy business interests than with pursuing political programs'.[105] Third, post-democracy is marked by a decline in political participation in the classical sense.[106] The dialectical relationship between city and citizen has been replaced with corporation and consumer and political engagement has been replaced with leisure, consumption, and entertainment.[107] The final characteristic of post-democracy is the oligarchic rule that the privileged minority has over the majority, causing 'a crisis of representation'.[108] The crisis is a radical disassociation between the politician and his or her constituents due to lobbyists and other corporate agents consuming an ever expanding portion of the politician's attention and interests, namely the interest of staying in power.[109]

Conclusion

These four metaphors do a good job describing how the ground has shifted as cultures that were once firmly seated within the Enlightenment and modern ideals find themselves in a different condition. The problem remains, however. The 'contemplative gaze' this essay has taken suggests that we do not have language adequate enough to speak of it as it is. We can try to break this 'post- condition into smaller forms or categories such as 'Endless Desire', 'Late Capitalism', 'Post-materialism', and 'Post-democracy' but more categories emerge that demand nuance, critique, and answers to other questions. This does not mean the pursuit is an unfruitful one. Even in just these categories this essay has identified where we can begin to see the cracks in the walls of the post-modern city; or, in the case of New Orleans, where the levees are the weakest. They are our 'project communities' and food deserts, our town squares and prisons. They are the places where the poor, the minority communities, and otherwise marginalised people groups have been relegated as their neighbourhoods have been gentrified under the guise of 'economic progress'. They are the places that have otherwise been 'abandoned by Empire'.[110] As the beginning quote from Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* suggests, these are also the places where God dwells and there is real potential for cultural transformation when the church opts to inhabit these places as well.

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[105] Ibid., p. 68.
[106] Ibid., p. 69.
[107] Ibid., pp. 70-71.
[108] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Margret M. McKenna, 'Mark I: Relocation to the Abandoned Places of Empire' from The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005).