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Theological Reflections on Aristotelian Themes  
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# Happiness, The Life of Virtue and Friendship: Theological Reflections on Aristotelian Themes

STANLEY HAUERWAS

## Part I: On Being Temporally Happy

### THE PROBLEM WITH HAPPINESS

I am not happy with happiness. I do not trust being happy and I tend not to trust happy people. For how can anyone who is happy know what the world is like? We live in a world of suffering and tragedy that defies attempts to be happy. I especially distrust people who try to be happy because happiness, whatever it is, does not seem to be something we can accomplish. The kind of self-involvement that trying to be happy entails is simply incompatible with the disinterestedness which is characteristic of genuinely good people.

I particularly distrust the notion of happiness when it is associated with religion. For example, when Christianity is commended as a religion of happiness it always seems to lose any critical bite. It becomes a religion promising satisfaction for the well-off such that the radical demands of the gospel are overlooked or explained away. As a religion of happiness, Christianity becomes a general form of religiosity that is so functionally useful the question of whether it is true hardly makes any difference. Moreover, if Christianity is about happiness then what are we to make of the repeated and insistent claims that suffering is the hallmark of the Christian life?

Because of this general unhappiness I have tended to avoid the language of happiness when thinking or writing about matters moral. This seems a bit odd,

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however, as no one has influenced me more than Aristotle, and the *Nichomachean Ethics* begins and ends with a discussion of happiness. Moreover, accounts of the moral life that stress the importance of virtue usually involve a teleological account which entails some sense of self-fulfillment. In my attempt to avoid happiness as a theme, therefore, I have used, somewhat arbitrarily, only the middle books of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and have developed an ethic of virtue that only promises faithfulness which may accidentally provide a sense of fulfillment.

Yet I suspect there is something deeply wrong with any attempt to give an account of the moral life that avoids happiness or at least makes it a secondary phenomenon. It may be that happiness is wrongly thought to be the end of the moral life, but it is quite another matter to think it has no relevance to living well. Moreover, no account of Christian ethics can avoid dealing with happiness, not only because it is such a prominent human concern, but also because the very nature of the Christian life entails a sense of well-being that is surely not entirely unlike what some have meant by happiness.

My sense of ambiguity about happiness is captured best by two scenes from the recent movie, *Tender Mercies*. In the first, Mac Sledge, after being told his daughter has died, is seen hoeing weeds in his garden. His new wife, who has helped him recover some sense of dignity, stands silently at the edge of the garden. Mac, without looking at her, says several times, "I don't believe in happiness." She makes no attempt to persuade him otherwise. Yet the movie closes with Mac throwing a football with his young stepson as if nothing else mattered. Like Mac, I do not believe in happiness, but I do believe in throwing footballs with stepsons. The problem is knowing how to describe the latter as a way of life.

I am going to try, therefore, to develop an account of happiness that I hope will do justice to our moral experience as well as suggest the role happiness might play in the life of those who desire to be Christians. As a way to explore the nature and role of happiness in the moral life, I am going to undertake an analysis of Aristotle's account of happiness. That turn to Aristotle is not surprising because it is a common assumption that his account in many ways still remains unsurpassed. I must say, however, that while I hope the analysis I develop is true to Aristotle, my primary interest is not interpreting Aristotle correctly--whatever that would mean. Rather, I am primarily concerned to use Aristotle to further how Christians ought to think about happiness. In the process, however, I hope to suggest why Aristotle's account is still so important--not only for what he says but for how his analysis is structured.

Of particular interest to me is Aristotle's claim that happiness "requires completeness in virtue as well as a complete lifetime" (1100a3-5).<sup>1</sup> Much of what I will attempt is to try to understand what such an observation could possibly mean. It is not only unclear what or how we could ever have completeness in virtue, but even more puzzling is the claim it takes a complete lifetime. For example, one of the implications of such a claim would seem to be that feeling happy is no guarantee we are happy. Put even more strongly, if you think or feel you are happy it is a good indication you are in the grip of an illusion or, even



worse, are deeply self-deceived. For according to Aristotle, it seems that happiness comes not during, but at the end of our life--thus the fear of untimely death. Happiness is the characteristic of those who live in a manner such that the end of their life confirms the way they have lived. As I hope to show, the happy person, thus, is one who can claim their death as their own.

Objections to such an account of happiness seem obvious since it seems we can be sure we are truly happy only when it is too late to enjoy that state. Yet I want to show that Aristotle's account of happiness is more plausible than it may at first appear. For I think Aristotle is rightly struggling to take account of the contingent and temporal character of our existence. That may not seem very significant if we fail to acknowledge, either personally or in our moral theory, how time can appear to be the great enemy of morality. For example, just think how, on a personal level, what appeared to be so clearly right later appears as pathetic if not positively corrupt. So often, both existentially and in theory, morality seems to be an attempt to defeat the necessity of such retrospective judgments in the hopes of securing moral consistency--a consistency that seems crucial if we are to achieve happiness.

Recognition of the timefulness necessarily means we must deal with questions of moral change and continuity. We usually think we ought to do some changing in our lives, but it is by no means clear how that conviction is compatible with our sense that a person of character has a stability that insures we can trust them to be who they are. As we shall see, Aristotle's analysis of the kind of person we must be to be capable of true happiness manifests rather than resolves this ambiguity. Exactly because his account of happiness does this, I hope to show that it is a particularly rich resource for helping understand what it might mean for Christians to be happy.

## HAPPINESS AS THE GOOD AND FINAL END

Where do you begin an analysis of the moral life? It has been the tendency of modern ethicists to begin their reflections on morality from as formal and minimal a starting point as possible. They have done so in the hopes of finding a foundation for ethics that is non-arbitrary and rationally compelling--that is, one not temporally determined. Aristotle begins in quite a different manner. He simply asks what most people think living life well involves--that is, what is the highest good. He suggests that many claim morality is about being happy, and he is willing to begin with that assumption. Yet Aristotle, in Socratic fashion, does not assume he knows what happiness entails for that is exactly the issue that needs investigation. Therefore, Aristotle accepts the common assumption that the highest good has to do with happiness only in the hope of tempting us to follow him with an investigation of that claim. We must be careful, therefore, not to assume any one statement adequately summarizes Aristotle's views about happiness as he constantly nuances his first formulations by further argument.

For example, Aristotle begins by observing that though all agree that happiness is the "highest good attainable by action," when they try to define happiness there is little agreement. Many say that happiness is some pleasure and/or

wealth; some identify happiness with different things at different times (thus, when sick it is health, when poor it is wealth, and so on); and some, the more cultivated who have thought about such matters, think happiness cannot consist in a list of goods but must be a good in and of itself which is the cause of all these goods (1095a20-30). Obviously the initial agreement on happiness as the "highest good" requires further analysis in order to be plausible.

Yet it is important to note that Aristotle does not assume that such analysis can be successful by ignoring what people actually want and desire. Happiness is not the result, as later Stoic thinkers would claim, of the eradication of desire. We will not be happy, according to Aristotle, if we purge our lives of all desires, but only when we desire the right things rightly. But even the most cultivated desires, such as that for honor, cannot bring happiness since honor depends on the opinions of others. Therefore, to be happy, Aristotle suggests we must desire that which cannot easily be taken away from us (1095b25-28).

As we shall see, this is a particularly important aspect of Aristotle's account of happiness. For though he says it can only be a "guess," at this point he continues to assume that happiness must be that which we cannot lose either through the actions of others or by outrageous fate. Thus he maintains that the happy person

will have the attribute of permanence and he will remain happy throughout his life. For he will always or to the highest degree both do and contemplate what is in conformity with virtue; he will bear the vicissitudes of fortune most nobly and with perfect decorum under all circumstances, inasmuch as he is truly good and "four-square beyond reproach" (1100b16-23).

Even more strongly he argues that

no supremely happy man can even become miserable, for he will never do what is hateful and base. For in our opinion, the man who is truly good and wise will bear with dignity whatever fortune may bring, and will always act as nobly as circumstances permit, just as a good general makes the most strategic use of the troops at his disposal, and a good shoemaker makes the best shoe he can from the leather available, and so on with experts in all other fields (1100b35-1101a6).

Yet Aristotle notes that there are reversals in fortune that can happen even to the happy man that can prevent him from being "supremely happy." Thus in Book Seven he says,

those who assert that a man is happy even on the rack and even when great misfortunes befall him, provided he is good, are talking nonsense, whether they know it or not. Since happiness also needs fortune, some people regard good fortune as identical with happiness. But that is not true, for even good fortune, if excessive, can be an obstruction; perhaps



we are, in that case, no longer justified in calling it "good fortune," for its definition is determined by its relation to happiness (1153b20-24).

We thus have an increasingly complex picture. Aristotle accepts the general assumption that happiness is the satisfaction of desire, but the question of the kind of desire we should have to be happy is not easily determined. He suggests that it must be a desire for that which is not easily lost, that is, that which will not be subject to the fortunes or time; yet it is unclear what could possibly satisfy such a demand.

In order to investigate this issue we must return to Aristotle's claim that happiness is the final end. As we have seen, Aristotle begins his account of happiness assuming that happiness has to do with an end, that is, the highest good attainable by action. This assumption reflects his general view that "all knowledge and every choice is directed toward some good" (1095a15). Every human activity has some good such that

it is one thing in medicine, another in strategy, and another again in each of the arts. What, then, is the good of each? Is it not that for the sake of which everything else is done? That means it is health in the case of medicine, victory in the case of strategy, a house in the case of building, a different thing in the case of different arts, and in all actions and choices it is the end. For it is for the sake of the end that all else is done. Thus, if there is some one end for all that we do, this would be the good attainable by actions; if there are several ends, they will be the good attainable by action (1097a17-24).

It is important to note the conditional in the last sentence, for Aristotle at this point does not assume that there is any one end for all that we do. He notes that it is obvious that there are many ends--e.g., wealth, health, power--that are means to something else. Thus, it is not obvious that all ends are final, but if there is one good it must be something final. But what would it mean for such an end to be final? It is an end, he suggests, that can be pursued for itself and not for something else. It is not a means to anything. And such a description seems to apply to happiness above all else:

for we always choose happiness as an end in itself and never for the sake of something else. Honor, pleasure, intelligence, and all virtue we choose partly for themselves--for we would choose each of them even if no further advantage would accrue from them--but we also choose them partly for the sake of happiness because we assume that it is through them that we will be happy. On the other hand, no one chooses happiness for the sake of honor, pleasure, and the like, nor as a means to anything at all (1097b1-7).

Such a claim, however, is anything but obvious. Is Aristotle suggesting that

happiness is dominant in the sense that everything that we do is ultimately done for it? If so, such a view seems to presuppose a view of human action that is clearly mistaken. I may jog to lose weight, and I may desire to lose weight to better my health, and I may desire to better my health in order to live longer, and I may desire to live longer because--well, I am not sure why I desire to live longer. The reason I am not sure why I desire to live longer is not simply because I lack a clear aim in my life that requires more time, but because "desiring to live longer" is a complex set of desires that involves everything from wanting to see the Cubs win a World Series to enjoying a friendship. To describe the final end in such a singular manner simply fails to do justice to the complex nature of our desires.

Moreover, there simply seems to be something wrong about Aristotle's assumption that one action is always a means to something else. I may jog, even as boring as jogging is, for my health, but it is by no means clear that my jogging can best be described as a "means" at all. On the contrary, I jog because I like to jog. While I am glad that jogging can result in better health, the reason that I jog cannot be so easily explained. Indeed, any explanation for jogging, like any account of why we should desire to live longer, necessarily turns out to be complex.

Before we get too taken with such criticism, however, I think we need to reconsider what Aristotle is trying to say. Certainly Aristotle is not suggesting that simply because every action has an end, even if that end is itself, that therefore all actions have a common end. Nor is he suggesting, though it is easy to be misled here by his examples, that there is some particular act to whose end all others are subordinate.<sup>2</sup> Rather we must be particularly careful to note why Aristotle calls happiness a "final" good for he does not mean happiness is one among others. The point is that happiness, rather than being analogous to other goods we desire, is different in the sense it is sufficient in itself. And by "self-sufficient" he means that "which taken by itself makes life something desirable and deficient in nothing" (1097b15).

The criticism I made above of Aristotle's suggestion that all our activities are a means to the end of our happiness turns out to be misplaced. For this is exactly the notion Aristotle needs to display how happiness is a final end. As Ackrill says,

*Eudaimonia*--what all men want--is not the result or outcome of a lifetime's effort; it is not something to look forward to (like a contented retirement), it is a life, enjoyable and worthwhile all through. Various bits of it must themselves be enjoyable and worthwhile, not just means for bringing about subsequent bits. That the primary ingredients of *eudaimonia* for the sake of *eudaimonia* is not incompatible with their being ends in themselves; for *eudaimonia* is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Only if *eudaimonia* has such a character could it be a good that cannot easily be taken away from us. Indeed, that is why it might even be possible to be happy on



the rack even though by being such we may not be supremely happy.

If this is the case, then we can see why many commentators on Aristotle resist translating *eudaimonia* as happiness. For happiness is not an "end" that can be pursued or achieved separately from the kind of life we lead. Our life is not a means to some end called happiness. Rather *eudaimonia* is the name Aristotle gives to "the best possible life,"<sup>4</sup> which means it is impossible to abstract the meaning of happiness from the display of such a life--thus the virtues. We can now understand why since it is not so much an end or a way of life. But if not one end among others, how is such a way to be specified? How are we to understand the material content of happiness so construed? To answer these questions, we must turn to Aristotle's understanding of the *ergon* (function) of man.

#### WHAT EUDAIMONIA IS AND HOW IT IS ACQUIRED

The ever-candid Aristotle observed that it is "perhaps a little trite" to call *eudaimonia* the highest good and a clearer account is still required. He suggests that perhaps this can best be done by asking what is the proper function (*ergon*) of man (1097b21-25).

For just as the goodness and performance of a flute player, a sculptor, or any kind of expert, and generally of anyone who fulfills some function or performs some action, are thought to reside in his proper function, so the goodness and performance of man would seem to reside in his proper function (1097b25-30).

Aristotle's appeal to "function" at this point in his argument has often been criticized as viciously circular or as an unnecessary piece of metaphysics, since it only results in telling us that certain excellences are essential for happiness.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some have taken him to mean that the "good of man" that correlates with his function is a single thing in a manner that excludes all other goods. However, the latter criticism is clearly wrong. Aristotle, as I have tried to suggest, assumes that there are many different goods for man. Again, I think it is crucial that we not be misled by Aristotle's appeal to "a function," by remembering that he only proposes it as a way to explore further the nature of happiness as a characteristic of all our activities.

To discover man's proper function Aristotle notes that just as the eye, hand, or foot has its proper function, so must man have some function over and above the functions of his various parts. That function cannot be just living as he has that in common with the plants. Nor is man's function that of perception, as he has that in common with every animal. That leaves

an active life of the rational element. The rational element has two parts: one is rational in that it obeys the rule of reason, the other in that it possesses and conceives rational rules. Since the expression 'life of the rational element' also can be used in two senses, we must make it clear that we mean a life determined by the activity, as opposed to the mere

possession, of the rational element. For the activity, it seems, has a greater claim to be the function of man. The proper function of man, then, consists in an activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle or, at least, not without it (1098a2-8).

Again many have found fault with Aristotle's concentration on "reason" as the distinguishing mark of the human. It is often pointed out that there are countless things people do besides reasoning. Moreover, if there is any distinctiveness to human activity qua human activity, it does not reside in any one "mark"; but rather consists in the complex ways people have learned to coordinate the capacities and skills they share with all life. While Aristotle's use of the language of function leaves him open to such criticism, it is clear, I think, that he does not mean to suggest that the many things which people do are inconsequential to understanding human activity. Rather his point is the more simple--namely that "rationality" is simply not one activity among others that men do, but it is the activity that pervades all we do. Indeed it is exactly that power that allows us to coordinate the many capacities and skills we possess.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, once having made the suggestion that the distinctively human is exhibited in our rational activity, Aristotle proceeds immediately to muddy those already cloudy waters. He says that by "proper function" he means the same kind as the function of an individual who sets high standards for himself: thus the proper function of a harpist is that of one who has set high standards for himself (1098a8-10). Therefore "rational activity" is not some minimum possessed by all, though all men have the potential to possess it, but rather it is a high standard that is a mark of distinction.

Thus in a summary passage Aristotle says,

On these assumptions, if we take the proper function of man to be a certain kind of life, and if this kind of life is an activity of the soul and consists in actions performed in conjunction with the rational element, and if a man of high standards is he who performs these actions well and properly, and if a function is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the excellence appropriate to it; we reach the conclusion that the good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with the best and most complete. But we must add 'in a complete life.' For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one sunny day; similarly, one day or a short time does not make a man blessed and happy (1098a12-20).

So, rationality as the function of man is but the means Aristotle uses to note the whole set of virtues man needs to live well over the span of a life. For even though Aristotle distinguishes between theoretical and practical reason, and later suggests that contemplation is the form of life that most nearly approaches happiness (1177b24-26), he in fact assumes that practical reason is as much the source of happiness as the theoretical. Indeed it seems odd that he should sug-



gest that the practical life is happy only in a secondary sense (1178a9); while he bases his claim of the superiority of contemplation on its similarity to the gods (1178b25-30), that would make man's happiness based on an attribute which is not in his power, which is not his own function. Perhaps that is why Aristotle says that "happiness is *some kind* of study or contemplation," (1178b31) thus leaving vague the kind of activity he takes as his ideal.

Aristotle's emphasis on contemplation as the highest ideal certainly gives good grounds for those who would criticize him for an overly intellectual account of human activity. Yet such criticism fails to note the life of contemplation is impossible if we are not first living a virtuous life that entails the whole great gamut of human activities. Moreover, Aristotle never loses his good sense, for even though he is attracted to contemplation because of its promise of self-sufficiency, yet he maintains even the contemplative man

will need external well-being, since we are only human. Our nature is not self-sufficient for engaging in study: our body must be healthy and we must have food and generally be cared for. Nevertheless, if it is not possible for a man to be supremely happy without external goods, we must not think that his needs will be great and many in order to be happy; for self-sufficiency and moral action do not consist in an excess (of possessions) (1178b31-1179a22; see also, 1099a30-32).

The significance of these last considerations has often been overlooked by those who criticize Aristotle's account of happiness as too intellectualistic. As I have tried to suggest, happiness for Aristotle is not some single activity

to whose end the needs of all other human activities should be subordinated. He is not saying that there is some one end, the same one, of all particular actions. Virtuous activity or living humanly well do not signify one thing because there are different kinds of virtue and our happiness or perfection or ultimate end is constituted, not by some one virtue, but to the degree this is possible by them all.<sup>7</sup>

Happiness, it turns out, is thus a name of a set of virtuous activities. As Aristotle says, "*eudaimonia* is some kind of activity of the soul in conformity with virtue. All the other goods are either necessary prerequisites for happiness, or are by nature co-workers with it and useful instruments for attaining it" (1099b25-28).

But why then all the emphasis on "rationality as the function of man" and the corresponding suggestion that contemplation promises to be our best chance for happiness? Aristotle's own account of the complexity of practical reason certainly provides little basis for the assumption that theoretical reason is superior. Indeed, from the point of view of how we must actually live our lives, the moral virtues and the virtues of the practical intellect take precedence over those of the theoretical. Our final end, therefore, is not some particular good among others but is "constituted by a plurality of virtuous activities."<sup>8</sup>

I think one of the reasons Aristotle emphasized so strongly the importance of reason and contemplation as the ultimate form of the happy life was due to his haunting sense of the effect of time and fortune on the moral life.<sup>9</sup> For contemplation, thinking on those things that cannot be other than they are, seems to promise the kind of permanence that can make us impervious to outrageous fate. Yet he never assumed that contemplation was sufficient to insure an eudaemonistic life since what finally makes such a life possible, even one of contemplation, is our having a character sufficient to bear the vicissitudes of fortune nobly (1100b17-21).<sup>10</sup> As I noted above, Aristotle was keenly aware that frequent reverses can crush even the supremely happy. Only those who are noble and high-minded cannot be changed by such reverses, not because they are insensitive to pain, but because, as he says, they will never do what is hateful and base (1100b28-35).

Only if we are persons of virtue, therefore, is it possible for us to be happy through time.<sup>11</sup> We cannot have happiness unless we have acquired the virtues necessary to be people of character. To have character means we have a history that allows us to make our lives our own. In contrast, bad people cannot be happy for they "do not have the element of constancy" and thus do not "remain similar even to themselves" (1159b5-8). Goodness, as determined through the virtues, provides the skill necessary for us to be steady through the good and bad fortune of our lives. Thus, happiness is not so much acquired as it is discovered in the process of living virtuously.

That is why I suspect Aristotle cannot quite make up his mind whether happiness is a gift or is acquired. For, as he says,

if there is anything at all which comes to me as a gift from the gods, it is reasonable to suppose that happiness above all else is god-given; and of all things human it is the most likely to be god-given; inasmuch as it is the best. But although this subject is perhaps more appropriate to a different field of study, it is clear that happiness is one of the most divine things, even if it is not god-sent but attained through virtue and some kind of learning or training. And if it is better that happiness is acquired in this way rather than by chance, it is reasonable to assume that this is the way it is acquired....To leave the greatest and noblest of things to chance would hardly be right (1109b10-25).<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps now we are in a position to understand better why Aristotle insists that happiness requires completeness in virtue as well as a complete life. For in spite of his talk of happiness as the final end, we see happiness is not some ideal which is realizable only in the distant future. Indeed happiness is not so much an end, but the way. Happiness is the sense of self that comes from having acquired the virtues necessary to transverse the dangers and opportunities of our existence--dangers and opportunities that are intrinsic to the timeful character of our existence. Thus, happiness is not something that can be accomplished all at once. Rather it seems to be more like the ability to look back over our life and



be glad it is ours--in short, unless we have acquired a history, a life capable of narration, we have nothing about which to be happy. That is why happiness may not be possible for the young, as they have not yet lived long enough, they have not acquired the virtues necessary, even to know what it means to say they are happy. Yet that is also why Aristotle thinks it so crucial to initiate the young into the life of virtue. For only such a life can give us the skill to look back truthfully and still claim our life as our own.<sup>13</sup>

### ON BEING HAPPILY A CHRISTIAN

A fuller understanding of Aristotle's account of happiness obviously requires a discussion of the virtues and friendship. However, on the basis of the analysis of happiness I think some tentative theological observations can be made. As I suggested at the beginning, I think Aristotle can help us understand in what way it makes sense for Christians not only to be happy, but to desire to be happy. Let me now try to say why that is the case.

Some may feel that all this is a false problem. Of course Christians can and should be happy. After all, they are just like anyone else. If being Christian does not contribute to our happiness, what good is it? Yet many in the Christian tradition have challenged just that assumption. They have done so because of their fundamental conviction that the gospel is meant to challenge, if not destroy, our presumptions about what will make us happy in this life. Christianity does not promise fulfillment, but rather a way to live in the world truthfully and without illusion. It is, after all, a little hard to believe that a people who take as their central belief a crucified God can believe that life is finally about happiness. From such a perspective, Christian convictions are more nearly true not because they underwrite our assumptions about what constitutes human fulfillment, but because Christianity challenges our facile presumptions that God is primarily concerned with our happiness.

Therefore many Christian writers have suggested that suffering rather than happiness is the hallmark of the Christian life. While the Christian is certainly not encouraged to seek out bad fortune, at least for some, a bit of bad luck is seen as a positive aid for learning to live as a Christian. For such suffering tests the genuineness of the Christian's conviction that they live not for their own glory, but that of God.

There is no doubt that there is something right about this emphasis. Moreover, in a culture like our own that seems bent on the satisfaction of every desire no matter how shallow, such a challenge appears positively salutary. In a time when the desire of many for happiness results in a desperate devaluing of all questions of significance, any challenge to the superficiality of our desires seems more likely right than wrong.

Yet there also seems something wrong with any account of the Christian life that denies all moral significance to happiness. For the salvation wrought in Jesus of Nazareth, we believe, offers a new way of life that certainly brings with it a sense of satisfaction. The issue is how that satisfaction is to be understood. And in this respect I think that Aristotle is a critical resource.

Aristotle reminds us that happiness is not so much a goal as a way; or perhaps more accurately, happiness but names the kind of a person we must be if we are to face the nature of this existence with courage and faithfulness. In this sense, Aristotle helps us understand why we rightly understand the kind of life we are called to live as Christians as a journey rather than an answer. For what we are offered as Christians is not a formula for successful living, but a way to go on such that we will be able to look back over our lives with a sense of satisfaction--that is, happily.

Let me put it this way. One of the difficulties of taking up any significant way of life is that we never adequately understand what we are doing. Significant commitments are asked of us that we are not in a position to appreciate when we first undertake them. For example, we never know what we are doing when we get married.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, you do not even know what kind of commitment you have made until you can look back on it twenty years later. You do not even know what it would mean to call a marriage happy until you have lived it for many years. But if that is the case then why would we ever undertake such a life? We do so, I think, because we do not know what we are doing.

But what if the same is true of taking on the story of being a Christian? Most of us have done so not knowing what we were doing. In effect, our being Christian is more a matter of fortune than something we have done. We may regret or rejoice that we are so identified, but there seems little we can do about our having been identified. But if Aristotle is right, that is the character of life itself. There is no way to avoid the temporal character of our existence. Our desire for happiness forces us to be one thing and not another. Yet that very desire also becomes the way that we can test the authenticity of the concrete embodiment of that desire. For any truthful way of life must admit as well as promise an answer to the question--"Are you happy?"<sup>15</sup>

I take it that fundamental to Christian convictions is the assurance that anyone who has followed the way of life we call Christianity will be able to look back on their life and say, "I would not have it otherwise." And to say this is the happiest thing anyone can say, if they say it truthfully and without self-deception. Therefore, Aristotle's account of happiness helps us understand the structure of Christian convictions insofar as he helps us understand in what manner they make us happy.

The difference between Aristotle and Christianity is not that the one teaches us to desire happiness and the other does not. Rather, I think we will find the profoundest difference is the kind of person we must be if we are to be capable of happiness. For Aristotle, it seems we can only be happy if we achieve a self-sufficiency that guards us against outrageous fortune. The Christian claim that our lives can be satisfying only to the extent they are formed in reference to a concrete historical individual could only strike Aristotle as the height of absurdity. For that is to make our happiness depend on a historically contingent starting point, a piece of luck, that we cannot control. Yet it is the claim of Christians that only when we learn to live our lives on that basis will we be on the way to living a life of happiness.



To return to the point I made at the beginning, it is the Christian claim that to the extent we learn to have our lives determined by the God we find in Jesus of Nazareth will we have the resource to make our deaths our own. Moreover, it is that resource that gives us the power to stand against the world whose power derives from its false promises to give our lives significance. In contrast, Christians claim that our death, even untimely, cannot be robbed of meaning, for God has in fact insured our life and death through the cross and resurrection of Christ. Thus we can die confident that we will be remembered by those future generations God will call to be His Church. Doesn't that sound like good news?

## Notes

1. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, tr. by Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1962). All references will appear in the text.
2. J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 17. The essays in this volume make one of the best commentaries on Aristotle's ethics available. In his *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), John Cooper notes that in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1097b16-209) "a number of good things rather than as demonstrated by a single end, on the ground that flourishing must be the consummately best thing, whereas any quantity of a concrete good thing can be bettered by the addition to it of some quantity, however small, of another good thing, however slight." p. 99.
3. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," p. 19.
4. Ibid., p. 24. Again as Cooper suggests, "Morally virtuous action may then be a 'means' to the ultimate end of flourishing, not in the sense that it tends to bring it about, or doing favors for the right people makes a government functionary rich, but in the sense that it is one constituent part of the conception of flourishing which constitutes the virtuous person's ultimate end" (p.82).
5. Georgios Anagnostopoulos, "Aristotle on Function and Attributive Nature of the Good," in *The Greeks and the Good Life*, ed. David Depew (Fullerton: California State University Press, 1980), p. 96.
6. Ralph MacInerney, *Ethical Thomistica* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1982), p. 22. Aquinas, I suspect, suggests the heart of Aristotle's view when he says, "In man it is one thing that he is a mortal rational animal, and another that he is an animal capable of laughter. We must, therefore, consider that every delight is a kind of proper accident resulting from happiness or from some *part* of happiness, since the reason that a man is delighted is that he has some fitting good, either in reality, or in hope, or at least in memory," *Summa Theologica* I, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 2:6.

7. Ibid., p. 23.

8. Ibid., p. 24.

9. Political considerations also concerned Aristotle. As Amelie Rorty rightly notes, "It is only in a corrupt polity that the contemplative life need be otherworldly, and only in a corrupt polity that the policies promoting the development and exercise of contemplative activity would come into conflict with those establishing requirements for the best practical life. Aristotle's discussion of friendship in Book 9 helps show what contemplation can contribute to the comprehensive practical life. By placing that discussion in the middle of his treatment of pleasure, Aristotle shows how virtuous friendship enables a person of practical wisdom to recognize that his life forms a unified, self-contained whole, itself an *energeia*. The discussion of friendship provides a transition from the Book 7 account of pleasure as the unimpeded exercise of basic natural activities to the Book 10 account of pleasure as perfecting activities—an account that makes sense of a person finding pleasure in contemplating the whole of a virtuous life" ("The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980], p. 378). Aristotle's problem was the absence of any good polity and as a result his account of contemplation sounds sufficient to itself. For a good discussion of the place of contemplation in Aristotle's ethics see Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 94-106.

10. These are the issues that are at the heart of Martha Nussbaum's wonderful book, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). She depicts the Greek concern to find a way to live so that our lives might not be subject to the unpredictable vicissitudes of life—that is, that we might to some extent be self-sufficient. Yet at that same time they saw that part of the peculiar beauty of human excellence, the virtues themselves, makes our lives more vulnerable. Courage is essential if we are to be steadfast, but if we are courageous we cannot help but make our existence more dangerous. Therefore, the very means necessary to make our lives less subject to chance cannot help but make our lives more vulnerable. I cannot take the time here to explore Nussbaum's extraordinary account of the relation between the Greek tragedians, Plato and Aristotle. On the whole I think she is right that at least in some of Plato's work we see an attempt to overcome the role of fortune (and tragedy) in the moral life, an attempt that finds its final and most complete expression in Kant's account of the morality, and that Aristotle is about a recovery of the tragedians' insight in his work. However, I think that Aristotle's account of the highminded man who is always ready to give but not receive, who wants his friends near him when he has benefited from good fortune but not bad, still manifests the desire to give an account of the moral life that is impervious to fortune. Yet Aristotle's willingness to philosophize within the "appearances" as well as his account of friendship as integral to the good life means his account of *eudaimonia* cannot avoid some sense of the tragic. For a more extended set of reflections on Nussbaum, see my "Can Aristotle be a Liberal? or Nussbaum on Luck," *Soundings* (forthcoming).

11. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, p. 75-76. Sherman rightly emphasizes the temporal as integral to Aristotle's account of the moral life. She suggests that Aristotle's understanding of the temporal constraint on rationality is not simply that a given end requires the setting of true intentions which constrain immediate action as few of our rational



desires are so simply displayed. Our moral life is constituted by a network of ends so that we are constrained not merely by the isolated pursuit of separate ends over time, "but by a desire to see these ends optimally coordinated in some coherent pattern in and through time. This integration problem emerges when one begins to consider how to live in an ordered way."

12. There is an important distinction to be drawn between the kind of luck we experience as integral to our moral projects and that which is just "dumb." Thus the courageous know that by being such they may have to expose themselves to unexpected dangers, but they cannot expect to get cancer. Having gotten the latter they may be expected to respond to it with courage, thus turning their fate into destiny. But Aristotle raises here the very possibility that our ability to develop character may be a matter of luck. Of course that is exactly the possibility that Kant wanted to avoid as he labored to ground morality in rationality qua rationality, thus insuring that anyone had the capacity to be "moral." In contrast, Aristotle, and I think Christians, cannot avoid acknowledging that the moral life is a contingent matter. That is the reason that the Christian witness is such an imperative, for without the example of the other we die.

13. Of course crucial to such retrospective judgment is forgiveness. We are unable to make our past our own unless we are capable of accepting forgiveness for what we have done even when we were not "fully responsible." Yet forgiveness is a troubling notion for Aristotle, for to be capable of accepting forgiveness seems to make us vulnerable to the very aspects of our lives that threaten self-sufficiency. For further reflections on these matters, see my "Constancy and Forgiveness: The Novel as a School for Virtue," *Notre Dame English Journal*, 15 (Summer, 1983): 26-54.

14. I have sometimes said that the primary relationship between Christianity and marriage, particularly when the latter is understood as life-long fidelity, is that they are both meant to teach you that life is not about happiness. Both involve the undertaking of a commitment that we could not understand prior to the living out of that commitment. But, ironically, they both teach us that happiness is only possible retrospectively.

15. John Wesley, in his "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," suggested that one of the most important questions you can ask anyone is "Are you happy?", assuming that the question of the rationality of religion was not separable from questions of happiness. For he says, "You eat, and drink, and sleep, and dress, and dance, and sit down to play. You are carried abroad. You are at the masquerade, the theatre, the opera house, the park, the levee, the drawing-room. What do you do there? Why, sometimes you talk; sometimes you look at one another. And what are you to do tomorrow, the next day, the next week, the next year? You are to eat, drink, and sleep, and dance, and dress, and play again....Are you, can you, or any reasonable man, be satisfied with this? You are not. It is not possible you should. But what else can you do? You would have something better to employ your time; but you know not where to find it upon earth. And, indeed, it is obvious that the earth, as it is now constituted, even with the help of all European arts, does not afford sufficient employment to take up half the waking hours of its inhabitants. What then can you do? How can you employ the time that lies so heavy upon your hands? This very thing which you seek declare we unto you. The thing you want is the religion we preach. That alone leaves no time upon our hands. It fills up all the blank spaces of life." *The Works of John Wesley*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 8:18-19.



## Part II: The Virtues of Happiness

### WHY HAPPINESS REQUIRES THE VIRTUES

We begin by wanting to be happy, but to be so, at least according to Aristotle, we are led to a life of virtue.<sup>1</sup> It seems any happiness worth having is that which a person of worth achieves. But *achieves* is almost too strong a word; it sounds as if we can become happy by following a set of prescriptions at the end of which happiness is guaranteed. The problem with such a view, however, is that the virtues are not just the means to happiness, they are the form of happiness itself.

Aristotle's account of happiness presupposes the temporal character of our lives. One swallow does not make a spring any more than one good act (or even one good day) makes us morally worthy. Aristotle, therefore, is struggling to understand what is necessary to sustain us for the long haul. Put in my language, we are on a journey, or more accurately, the self is a journey. But if that is the case, then what do we need in order to prepare for living a life that, in a sense, never stops?

Perhaps the significance of this can be made clear by asking you to consider the difference between going on a trip and undertaking a journey. When I go on a trip, I know where I am going, how long it will take, what preparations I need to make, and what I am going to do or hope to accomplish. When I undertake a journey, I often have only a hazy idea of where I am going, how long it will take, how to prepare, or what I hope to accomplish. Thus, I make *trips* to Texas, but if I were to go to India it would be a *journey*. (Of course, for some, going to Texas would be more like a journey.)

Our metaphorical use of *trip* and *journey* illustrates their differences. We say some experiences were a "trip" which means they were different, interesting, and a bit unusual. But as a "trip" they leave no lasting impression and we know when they are over. Thus anyone who suggests that "life is a trip" is making a significant claim that it's fun but nothing you ought to take too seriously. We think it more appropriate to suggest that life is a journey, for that suggests more than a movement from one place to another, but rather a development over time where I may make no physical movements but go through significant changes.

To a large extent recent moral philosophy, in an attempt to articulate the working moral presumptions of our culture, has tried to depict the moral life more as a trip than a journey.<sup>2</sup> Ethics is a matter of having a clear idea of where you want to go and working out the means to get there. Therefore the proper business of ethics is to concentrate on decisions and their justifications. Typical

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moral "issues" lie behind questions such as: What should we do when we have ten patients suffering from kidney disease and only seven dialysis machines? or, Is abortion wrong? Or, What is wrong with sex before marriage? Such questions are hard, but we feel that we can throw light on such matters by rigorous analysis. Life is a series of such decisions. Life is a trip.

Our concentration on this aspect of our lives has led us, however, to overlook the fact that our lives are not constituted by such decisions. Rather our decisions, or even more importantly, those matters we do not subject to decisions, reflect fundamental dispositions and orientations that form our lives. For example, most of us think it good to be kind, but being kind is not the result of some decision we have made. Rather kindness derives from our having certain "overall" aims that constitute what our lives are about. But how are we to understand the status of such aims and their place in our lives? At least to ask that question is to begin to appreciate why morally we cannot avoid thinking of life as a journey.

Aristotle's means of trying to get a handle on the language of overall aims was through a discussion of the virtues.<sup>3</sup> The virtues for Aristotle are a set of excellences that help us become the kind of person who is capable of respect. The virtues are those skills that provide the means for us to have the stability of self so that happiness is a characteristic of our lives rather than the achievement of objects of satisfaction. Therefore the question of whether the good life is or can be happy can be answered only by asking, "Happy for whom?" The only happiness worth having is that which the person of worth, the person of virtue, has.

But we must remember that the virtues are not simply given. They are not like the luggage we need in order to go on a trip. Rather the virtues are what they are because we do not know where we are going. We do not know where we are going because the very virtues necessary to begin the journey are crucial to its outcome--that is, they are intrinsic to the end. So, we can only know what we have become retrospectively. Therefore, we cannot know what kind of happiness we desire until we have acquired the virtues.

It is to Aristotle's account of the virtues that we must now turn.

## ON BECOMING VIRTUOUS

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not try to establish a set of central virtues corresponding to different aspects of the soul. Indeed as we read Aristotle we are naturally drawn to Plato's account of courage, temperance, justice and wisdom as it gives us a sense of order and balance in comparison to Aristotle's more chaotic account of the virtues. Aristotle's lists of the virtues include not only the above, but also generosity, magnificence, highmindedness, a nameless virtue between ambition and lack of ambition, gentleness, truthfulness, wittiness, justice and friendship. He makes no attempt to suggest a hierarchy or priority of the virtues, though his treatment of courage and temperance in relation to his general analysis of virtue and choice seems to suggest they have a significance the others do not. Yet he never explicitly suggests what such a significance might involve. Though one assumes that a person of virtue might be deficient in a par-

ticular virtue--like gentleness--there is no way they could be virtuous without courage or temperance.

Aristotle's account of the mean, moreover, is not sufficient to counter the suspicion that his choice of the virtues is arbitrary. We feel that he had made up his mind what virtues he wanted to commend and what kind of person he took as his ideal before ever developing the virtues as a mean between various extremes. His own account of the mean is enough to sustain such a critique because, on analysis, the mean turns out to be extremely complex. Virtue is not some abstract mean that can be established in the abstract, but

is concerned with emotions and actions, and it is in emotions and actions that excess, deficiency, and the median are found. Thus we can experience fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and generally any kind of pleasure and pain either too much or too little, and in either case not properly. But to experience all this at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner--that is the median and the best course, the course that is a mark of virtue (1106b15-23).

The virtues which Aristotle analyzes are not so much "a mean" as they are the kind of characteristics he thinks necessary to be the kind of person who feels the right things rightly.

If we look more closely at Aristotle's account of the individual virtues, our difficulties multiply. For example, Aristotle says that a generous man is characterized by giving to the right people rather than by taking from the right and not taking from the wrong sources. Excellence consists in doing rather than having good done to one, in performing noble actions rather than in not performing base ones (1120a10-15). Thus a person who is good is "not one to accept good turns lightly" (1120a35). This same kind of note is continued in Aristotle's account of high-mindedness; that is, one who is worthy of honor because of his excellence and good fortune is the kind of person who will do good but is "ashamed to accept a good turn, because the former marks a man as superior, the latter as inferior" (1124b8-10). Such a man is reluctant to ask for any favor but readily offers aid.

It is easy to criticize Aristotle's account of such a man and his corresponding virtues from our perspective. Indeed we are almost tempted to make fun of such an "ideal" when Aristotle tells us that such a person will have a slow gait, "a deep voice, and a deliberate way of speaking. For a man who takes few things seriously is unlikely to be in a hurry, and a person who regards nothing as great is not one to be excitable. But a shrill voice and a swift gait are due to hurry and excitement" (1125a12-16). This is clearly someone most of us would prefer not to know.

But such a judgment is premature if we try to appreciate the problem Aristotle is trying to address. What is crucial for the life of virtue is a certain kind of sufficiency that we might call integrity or constancy.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a passage more



likely to appeal to our sensibilities, Aristotle says the high-minded

is not a gossip, for he will talk neither about himself nor about others, since he is not interested in hearing himself praised or others run down. Nor again is he given to praise; and for the same reason he does not speak evil of others, not even of his enemies, except to scorn them. When he encounters misfortunes that are unavoidable or insignificant, he will not lament and ask for help. That kind of attitude belongs to someone who takes such matters seriously. He is a person who will rather possess beautiful and profitless objects than objects which are profitable and useful, for they mark him more as self-sufficient (1125a5-12).

It is a mistake to let ourselves be misled into dismissing Aristotle's account of the virtues because of our distaste for the outward manifestations he associates with the high-minded. Behind his account of the high-minded lies an essential insight about virtue--namely, the virtuous are such only because their virtue derives from, as well as is formed by, a certain kind of steadfastness of character. That such should be the case is not surprising if, as I have suggested, Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* can be displayed by the notion of journey.<sup>5</sup> Knowing we are necessarily on a way but unsure of where we are ultimately headed means we must be well prepared for the undertaking. To be prepared means we must have a center that is not easily destroyed by the good or evil fortune we are bound to meet along the way. Aristotle's account of the high-minded is but an attempt to suggest the kind of character necessary to be able to feel the right things rightly as well as act at the right time, in the right way and toward the right people.

The difference between the arts and the virtues illustrates the necessity of such character for the life of virtue. In the arts, excellence lies in the results themselves; but in matters of virtue an act is not just or temperate unless the agent has certain characteristics as he performs it: "first of all, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose to act the way he does, and he must choose it for its own sake; and in the third place, the act must spring from a firm and unchangeable character" (1105a26-35). Acts that appear to be just and self-controlled cannot properly be called such without reference to the person who has performed them: "The just and self-controlled man is not he who performs these acts, but he who also performs them in the way just and self-controlled men do" (1105b7-9). We cannot become courageous by slavishly imitating the actions we associate with courage, but we must *be* the kind of person who is capable of acting courageously.

Aristotle contends, therefore,

that people may perform just acts without actually being just men, as in the case of people who do what has been laid down by the laws but do so either involuntarily or through ignorance or for an ulterior motive, and not for the sake of performing just acts. (Such persons are not just



men) despite the fact that they act the way they should, and perform all the actions which a morally good man ought to perform. On the other hand, it seems that it is possible for a man to be of such a character that he performs each particular act in a way as to make him a good man (1144a12-18).

That a person of virtue is able to act so that each act contributes to his being a good man is the result that the action proceeds from a "firm and unchangeable character" so that the act is done for its own sake--that, I think, is what Aristotle is trying to get at through his depiction of the high-minded.

But what does it mean for an act to be done for its own sake and why should that be a mark of character? Aristotle does not try to answer that question as he assumes that it is obvious--namely, we become good by doing what good and just people do. Yet more needs to be said if we are to understand why this is the case. On Aristotle's account we seem caught in a circle not easily resolved--if virtuous actions require us to be persons of character, yet we can have such character only as we have acquired the virtues, then from whence does our character come that allows us to act virtuously? To suggest that our actions must be done for their own sake is not sufficient, since it is by no means clear what that would mean since the description of the action must include some account of "results."

The circular nature of Aristotle's account is only complicated by his extremely nuanced account of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom, like virtue, is not governed by the attempt to secure or accomplish some result. Nor is it like science, since it deals with matters that "admit of being other than they are" (1140b2). Practical wisdom aims at good actions as an end in itself, but that is why we cannot have such wisdom without "self-control." Self-control "preserves" practical wisdom since, in matters that depend on judgment, pleasure and pain can destroy or pervert every conviction we hold. We can only become self-controlled if we act with practical wisdom, but we cannot possess such wisdom unless we are self-controlled (1140b11-20).

Within the terms with which Aristotle is working, I think there is no satisfying account that may alleviate the circularity he seems unable to avoid. That does not mean, however, that he is without resources to counter certain kinds of objections, particularly if we attend to his suggestion that actions that contribute to our moral goodness must spring from a "firm and unchangeable character." It is that which makes possible our ability to know and choose what we are doing as well as doing it for its own sake. But asking that we "know what we are doing" is an extraordinary demand, for seldom do we really know what we are doing. Often we only "know" what we have done long after we have done it. By "know," however, I think Aristotle means we must be able to describe what we are doing honestly as what we are doing in terms of our ongoing life as a person of virtue.<sup>6</sup> Thus, I cannot try to avoid the demands of my friends and still think of myself as generous. To be generous requires that I steadfastly face the demands of being generous and will that as my own, as I would not choose to be other. Moreover, that is why I can choose to act in no other way, for if I did I would not be who I

am. Thus, I can only be generous if I do not have to will or try to be such.

Put simply, Aristotle's account of the kind of behavior characteristic of a person of virtue is that of a person at ease with him or herself. In a sense, the language of self-sufficiency is misleading, for the virtuous are not persons who need nothing, but rather they are ones who are satisfied with what they have done because they know it is how they should act if they are to be virtuous. In short, they can act the way they do because they are happy. What they do is not duty for duty's sake; instead there is an ease to their behavior that reflects their desire to be nothing other than what they are. Happiness, therefore, becomes one of our essential checks against self-deception--the difficulty is that it is also one of our greatest temptations to self-deception.

To be a person of character, therefore, cannot be attained by simply trying to attain all the virtues Aristotle lists, though they are obviously significant for a person of character. Just as we can no more become virtuous by doing one virtuous act after another, neither can we become persons of character by some mixture of the various virtues. To be sure, the individual virtues have a particular *telos* that direct us, but that is just the problem. The various virtues pull in different directions and may in fact conflict (the gentle person may well be tempted not to press strongly claims of justice, and so on). Of course, Aristotle in principle denies such conflicts since everything is finally a matter of judgment. Thus, gentleness is not the absence of anger or conflict, but describes one who is angry only under the right circumstances and for as long as reason demands (1125b31-35). But this only reminds us that if the various virtues are to constitute a single life we must be, in Aristotle's terms, persons of character.<sup>7</sup>

But whence does such character come? In what sense can we be said to be responsible for the development of such character if our very ability to be agents in the first place depends on our having character? The individual virtues may be acquired by engaging in certain kinds of activities since a "given kind of activity produces a corresponding character" (1114a8). But there is no one activity that corresponds to character, so character is not on all fours with the other virtues. Our character is determined by the end, and, finally, that is

not determined by the choice of the individual himself, but by a natural gift of vision, as it were, which enables him to make correct judgments and to choose what is truly good: to be well endowed by nature means to have this natural gift. For to be well and properly provided by nature with the greatest and noblest of gifts, a gift which can be got or learned from no one else, but which is one's possession in the form in which nature has given it: that is the meaning of being well endowed by nature in the full and true sense of the word (1114b5-11).

But then how can we be said to be responsible for our character?

Though I think that Aristotle provides no satisfactory answer to this question, we can be helped toward a solution if we remember the temporal character of the moral life. Aristotle does not assume we acquire all the virtues all at once.



Rather we learn to be courageous in relation to a set of activities and then find that the skills learned there have implications for other aspects of our lives. Moreover, the interrelation of the virtues seem to have a pull that extends our lives beyond what we had anticipated. We learn that it is not enough that we be courageous, but we must be courageous as a person of self-control is courageous. But neither is self-control sufficient in itself, as the self-controlled person must be capable of the anger that derives from our being just. Thus the development of one virtue leads to, or at least makes us open to, being formed by other virtues.

This perhaps helps explain how the development of the virtues are crucial to our becoming people of character, but it is obviously not sufficient. As we have already noted, character is not simply all the virtues added up; nor is it the particular mixture of the virtues characteristic of one person. Character is not simply the collection or combination of many virtues, but rather all the various virtues must be formed by character if they are to be genuine--that is, not easily lost so that we would not will to be other than who we are.

Confronted with this kind of problem one might well be tempted to conclude that Aristotle's account of the virtues, indeed his very characterization of morality, is incoherent. Not only is his depiction of the individual virtues arbitrary, he is not able to provide us with a satisfying account of how we become persons of character. It is enough to make you want to return to an ethic of "What should I do in X or Y situation?"

However, we must remember that as yet we do not have the full story. It may be that friendship is the crucial element that is missing from this account. The virtues, as I have treated them here, appear as individual achievements. Morally, it seems we are isolated beings who must forge out of the complexities of our experience a decent and virtuous life. But Aristotle does not assume we are so isolated.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, we can only be virtuous to the extent we are capable of being a friend; or perhaps even more strongly, it may be that without friendship we are incapable of having the character necessary for the acquiring of virtue. Determining why that is the case must wait until we next look at friendship. At the very least, however, we can now appreciate why friendship is such a significant issue for Aristotle.

## THE LIFE OF CHRISTIANS AS THE LIFE OF VIRTUE

But what are we to make theologically of this account of the virtues? Christians, no less than non-Christians, need the virtues to live well. Christians can be no less courageous, no less just, no less temperate, no less wise or prudent than anyone else. Therefore an ethic of virtue insofar as it helps us learn what is required to live well, to live happily, is no less important to us.

There is certainly truth to this, but it suffers from being too simple. It assumes that the "virtues" that help us live well are straightforward and clear; but on the basis of Aristotle's account, that can hardly be assumed. What justice meant to Aristotle may not be what it means for Christians.<sup>9</sup> Thus arises the constant emphasis by Christian theologians that the virtues of the pagans are nothing less



than sin unless transformed by grace. Indeed, Augustine even suggested that unless justice, courage, temperance, and prudence were transformed by love they could be no use to the Christian.

It is not, moreover, just the content of the virtues that seems to present a problem for Christians, but also their nature. This has been particularly true of Protestants who have been concerned to deny all attempts to establish a moral standing before God.<sup>10</sup> The virtues inextricably appear as something that is our achievement, that assures our righteousness, and thus only lead us further from the kind of life appropriate to those who have learned that we can only be good insofar as another has made us so. Virtue is a category that may be of use by Catholics, but we all know they are works of righteous people in the first place.

I believe those thinkers that have attempted to use the language of virtue for displaying the Christian life have not been wrong. However, I think that often the formulas they used for the appropriation of the language of virtue were not sufficient to suggest the complexity of the matter. For example, Aquinas, following Augustine, says that charity is the form of the virtues. Even more strongly, he says the natural virtues must be transformed by the infused theological virtues before they can be of service for those who would be followers of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Yet what does such language mean? Does charity add new content to the virtues? Or how does faith or hope transform courage? The formulas sound right, but they do little to help us understand how the virtues can be utilized for displaying the Christian life without that life being essentially transformed.

The moral life for Christians derives not from some general conception of the good, nor even from an analysis of those skills or excellences that allegedly allow human nature to flourish. Rather, the moral life of Christians is determined by their allegiance to a historical person they believe is the decisive form of God's kingdom. How then could the language of virtue serve to help us understand what it could mean to be a follower of Christ, a disciple of Jesus? After all, Jesus did not say if you are to be a follower of me you must develop those virtues that will make you a morally impressive person. Rather he said, "Come and follow me." Moreover, it seems that such a following may require nothing less than that we be willing to die for his sake. The person of virtue may die rather than compromise his integrity, but here we are asked to die not for some moral ideal but for the sake of another person.

While I think there is no easy solution to his seeming incompatibility, I want to offer a framework that suggests how Aristotle's account of the virtues can be appropriated. The kind of appropriation I suggest requires modification of some aspects of Aristotle's account, but in an interesting way I think the kind of modifications I have in mind are consistent with some of Aristotle's best intuitions.

The reason I think Aristotle's account of the virtues is important for a display of the Christian life is because his analysis of the virtues entails dealing with the temporal character of our life. For as we have seen, the virtues in fact are the means through which we are initiated into a journey. Indeed in a sense they are the form of the journey. Yet the outlines of that journey, its plot, its main characters, its dramatic tensions remain unclear. It is as if Aristotle worked out an



account of the moral life necessary for a strenuous task but no such task appeared that was worth the effort.

And it is exactly that emptiness at the heart of Aristotle's vision that makes him so appropriate as we reflect on the Christian life. As MacIntyre has suggested, it was no accident that Aristotle was seen by medieval thinkers to be such a fruitful source for attempts to provide a systematic presentation of the Christian life.<sup>12</sup> They could supply what Aristotle's account of virtue lacked--namely, a narrative in which the development of virtues made sense. For the medieval vision, schooled as it was on the Bible, was "historical in a way that Aristotle's could not be. It situates our aiming at the good not just in specific contexts--Aristotle situates that aiming within the polis--but in contexts which themselves have a history. To move towards the good is to move in time and that movement may itself involve new understandings of what it is to move towards the good."<sup>13</sup>

Situating Aristotle's account of the virtues in such a context meant that, just as Augustine and Aquinas suggested, the virtues were in fact transformed. Now they were put at the service of a community who had the task to live out the kind of life they believed had been made possible by Jesus of Nazareth. Charity becomes the form of the virtues, not through some mysterious transformation, but because the virtues are no longer self-referential. Rather they are skills for a people who are trying to be faithful to a journey they believe to be crucial for God's dealing with the world. Happiness just is my ability to rejoice in the presence of another, for it is the other that makes it possible for me to be one thing rather than another.

Therefore, more important than the specific virtues Aristotle recommends is how his account of the virtues begs for a narrative display. Indeed, at least part of what it means for the virtues to be transformed is the necessity of Christians to add new virtues to Aristotle's list. Hope is as important as courage, patience is as significant as justice, and faithfulness is as crucial as practical wisdom. These virtues do not appear in Aristotle's account because they obviously are intelligible in terms of the narrative that Christians believe they are living out. For hope, patience, and faithfulness are decisively eschatological virtues--that is, virtues required by a people who believe that our existence, as individuals and as societies, is fundamentally historic. There is no way out of history, there is no freedom from history, but rather our freedom is developing the virtues that make it possible to live in history in a way that is faithful to a God whom we believe has given us the means to live truthfully. And to live truthfully is finally the only way possible to live happily.

The acknowledgement of our historic character, moreover, may be exactly what is required to give an account of character that seemed so necessary to Aristotle's analysis of the virtues. For it seems the kind of constancy that makes our actions virtuous--that is, that makes what we do and do not do form a pattern of consistency--is possible only as we learn to be such from others. But how are such people known? I think only as they reflect a more determinative story that is embodied and lived out by a whole community.

Perhaps Aristotle is right finally that character is the result of a "natural gift

of vision," but he was wrong to think that such a gift was simply intrinsic to some people's being. Rather our character, our ability to be faithful to ourselves and others, is a gift because it is not finally something I do. My desire to be happy insures the fact that I can only make my way in the company of others. It is from my companions, that I learn the way of virtue. Therefore, any account of virtue that allows me to claim my life as an achievement rather than a gift is fundamentally false, and thus unable to sustain the truthfulness necessary for me to be faithful to myself or others. Again we are led to consider friendship not only as part of the life of virtue, but as crucial for our becoming people capable of being happy.

## Notes

1. One of the most striking differences between Aristotle's account of morality and modernity is Aristotle's lack of concern with any account of morality. He simply saw no reason to draw a hard and fast distinction between "morality" and "religion" or "morality" and "manners." It is with Kant that we get the peculiar modern notion that "morality" must be a distinguishable realm in the hope that morality might be grounded in the non-contingent. As Nussbaum rightly notes in *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Aristotle begins and ends with the "appearances." As she suggests, "Aristotle asks us to look at our practices, seeing, in the different areas, what sorts of judges we do, in fact, trust. This judgment about whom to trust and when seems to come, like the appearances, from us. We turn to doctors because we do, in fact, rely on doctors. This reliance, Aristotle insists, does not need to be justified by producing a further judge to certify the judge; it is sufficiently 'justified' by the facts of what we do. The expert, and our reasons for choosing him, are not behind our practices; they are inside them. And yet such experts do, in fact, help us to unravel puzzles" (p. 248).
2. See, for example, Edmund Pincoffs' attack on quandary ethics in his *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986).
3. We are in debt to Alasdair MacIntyre for the renewed interest in Aristotle's account of the virtues as well as the significance of the virtues for the moral life. See his *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). It would be a mistake to assume, however, that there is a new consensus about the importance of the virtues or how they are best understood. It is still the case that most philosophers and theologians that write about ethics do so in a manner that avoids questions of the virtues and/or treat the virtues as dependent on more "principled" approaches to ethics. For example, most of the essays on the virtues in the 1988 edition of *The Midwest Studies in Philosophy* deal with the virtues as secondary to more standard accounts of "ethics." See *Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, ed. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). In particular, the essays by Kurt Baier, Richard Regan and Michael Slote illustrate this tendency. For a particularly useful presentation of the objections to virtue theory as well as a response to those objections,



see David Solomon's essay "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics," in this volume, pp. 428-441. Part of the problem with the very characterization "an ethics of virtue" is that it makes it appear that such an ethic is a mirror alternative to those understandings of ethics that have been shaped by modernity. As MacIntyre's work makes clear, however, any attempt to recover the significance of the virtues will challenge the very paradigms of rationality and correlative political presumptions that have shaped modern accounts of the moral life.

4. MacIntyre emphasizes the importance of constancy by noting that it presupposes the notion of the unity of a human life and correlatively that the very concept of a "whole human life" makes sense. The ethical life, he notes, presupposes that "the commitments and responsibilities to the future spring from past episodes in which obligations were conceived and debts assumed unite the present to past and future in such a way as to make of a human life a unity." He argues that by the time of Jane Austen, who MacIntyre thinks to be the last great Christian Aristotelian, such unity can no longer be treated as the mere presupposition of the moral life. "It has itself to be continually reaffirmed and its reaffirmation in deed rather than in word is the virtue which Jane Austen calls a constancy. Constancy is crucial in at least two novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, in each of which it is a central virtue of the heroine. And without constancy all the other virtues to some degree lose their point. Constancy is reinforced by and reinforces the Christian virtue of patience, just as patience which is reinforced by and reinforces the Aristotelian virtue of courage, is not the same as courage. For just as patience necessarily involves recognition of the character of the world, of a kind which courage does not necessarily require, so constancy requires a recognition of a particular kind of threat to the integrity of the personality in the peculiarly modern social world, a recognition which patience does not necessarily require" (*After Virtue*, p. 242).

5. I certainly do not mean to suggest that Aristotle would welcome the notion of journey as integral to his construal of the virtues, but rather that the teleological character of the moral life he presupposes can be so displayed.

6. Nancy Sherman provides the best account available of Aristotle's understanding of moral education in *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 157-199. She rightly emphasizes how crucial friendship is for the development of practical wisdom and character. As she notes, "we can say that the rational pursuit of ends includes, for Aristotle, a common or social conception of the good. This entails a jointly articulated end, as well as collaborative efforts in the promotion of it. In an important way rational agency and its objects are extended. What is within our power and perceptual gaze extends beyond the first person. Simply to make he informed choice and to see what is relevant often requires the resources of others" (p. 109).

7. Sherman rightly notes that "Aristotle's claim that the virtues are in principle consistent needs to be distinguished from the claim that the virtuous life is conflict free. The fact that the virtues 'may be' in principle consistent does not preclude the possibility of contingent conflicts" (*ibid.*, p.105).

8. I have not tried to deal in this essay with the complex issues surrounding the individualization of the virtues. Aristotle's resort to the mean, as we noted, is clearly unsatisfac-

tory. The virtues can only be individualized against a community's practices and the narratives that give those practices intelligibility. Aristotle simply assumed that we exist in such narratives not having had the disadvantage of being formed by the modern presupposition that we are individual selves prior to being part of a tradition.

9. I suspect an Aristotelian account may well be closer to the way Christians ought to think about justice than accounts such as John Rawls's (see his *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971]). For Aristotle no account of justice is possible that does not require that we have the virtue of justice. Rawls, on the other hand, writes to make justice possible for a social system of the presupposition that people need only be self-interested. For example, MacIntyre notes that Hobbes translates Aristotle's *pleonexia* as "a desire of more than their share." Yet Aristotle understood *pleonexia* to be no more or less than acquisitiveness. Nor can this be translated as greed as Irwin does. MacIntyre argues that "what such translations of '*pleonexia*' conceal from us is the extent of the difference between Aristotle's standpoint on the virtues and vices, and more especially his standpoint on justice and the dominant standpoint of peculiarly modern societies. For the adherents of that standpoint recognize that acquisitiveness is a character trait indispensable to continuous and limitless economic growth, and one of their central beliefs is that continuous and limitless economic growth is a fundamental good. That a systematically lower standard of living ought to be preferred to a systematically higher standard of living is a thought incompatible with either the economics or the politics of peculiarly modern societies. So prices and wages have come to be understood as unrelated—and indeed in a modern economy could not be related—to desert in terms of labor, and the notion of a just price or a just wage in modern terms makes no sense. But a community which was guided by Aristotelian norms would not only have to view acquisitiveness as a vice but would have to set strict limits to growth insofar as that is necessary to preserve or enhance a distribution of goods according to desert" (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* p. 112).

10. Gilbert Meilaender, a Lutheran, has developed a constructive account of the virtues. In particular see his *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Meilaender notes "before Christian ethicists latch too quickly onto an ethic of virtue, it is important to remember that an emphasis on character may sit uneasily with some strands of Christian beliefs. No theologian has urged this point more forcefully than Luther. The virtues are, many have wanted to say, 'good for us.' A sketch of the virtues is a picture of a fulfilled life, of the successful realization of a self. Such an approach cannot without difficulty be incorporated into a vision of the world which has at its center a crucified God—which takes, that is, not self-realization but self-sacrifice as its central theme. Furthermore, the very notion of character seems to suggest—has suggested at least since Aristotle—habitual behavior, abilities within our power, an acquired possession. And this in turn may be difficult to reconcile with the Christian emphasis on grace, the sense of the sinner's constant need of forgiveness, and the belief that we can have no claims upon the freedom of God" (p. x). As a committed Methodist, I cannot agree with Meilaender's way of putting the issue, since I do not think the "need for forgiveness" is a sufficient account of the salvation found in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus did not come just to forgive us our sins but to offer us new life in an ongoing kingdom.



11. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 2, Q. 65, article 2; Q. 63, article 3. For a further discussion of these issues, see my "On Developing Hopeful Virtues," *Christian Scholars Review*, 18 (December, 1988): 107-117.
12. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 175-177.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 176.





## Part III: Companions on the Way: The Necessity of Friendship

### IN THE BEGINNING WAS FRIENDSHIP

I began by suggesting that happiness, the life of virtue, and friendship were inextricably interrelated. We cannot understand the kind of happiness that we should desire without understanding the life of virtue, but the life of virtue, as we shall see, finally requires an account of friendship. Further, friendship turns out to be essential for illuminating any happiness worth having. Indeed I have argued this interrelation is but an indication of why any adequate account of the moral life inherently entails a sense of the temporal character of our existence. To understand and, more importantly, to live a life of virtue and happiness requires our willingness to undertake a journey that is as interesting as it is demanding. That it is such means friendship is required not only to understand the nature of the journey but to sustain us on the way.

I could as well have begun these articles by undertaking an analysis of friendship rather than happiness. In many ways that might have been preferable. Happiness suggests that the moral life is finally a matter of individual achievement and effort. Even the attempt to construe our desire for happiness in terms of a journey tends to underwrite this assumption, since we tend to associate accounts of journeys with heroic endeavors of an individual.

Thus Aristotle says at the beginning of Book VII,

Continuing in a sequence, the next subject which we shall have to discuss is friendship. For it is some sort of excellence or virtue, or involves virtue, and it is, moreover, most indispensable for life. No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods. Rich men and those who hold office and power are, above all others, regarded as requiring friends. For what good would their prosperity do them if it did not provide them with the opportunity for good works? And the best works done and those which deserve the highest praise are those that are done to one's friends (1155a1-10).

As we shall see, this assertion but scratches the surface of Aristotle's account of friendship. Just as Aristotle led us to see that the life of virtue is not simply a "means" to happiness, neither are friends incidental to the happy life. Rather

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friendship is intrinsic to our ability to live well, an activity crucial to the very meaning and nature of happiness. Thus in a summary passage Aristotle says,

We stated at the beginning that happiness is some kind of activity, and activity clearly is something that comes into being and not something we can take for granted like a piece of property. From the propositions: (1) being happy consists in liking and in being active, and as we stated at the beginning, the activity of a good man is in itself good and pleasant; (2) what is our own is a pleasant thing to us; (3) we are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than our own; and (4) the actions of persons who have a high moral standard are pleasant to those good men who are their friends, in that they possess both qualities which are pleasant by nature (i.e., they are good and they are their own); it follows that a supremely happy man will need friends of this kind. His moral purpose or choice is to observe actions which are good and which are his own, and such are the actions of a good man who is his friend (1169b28-1170a3).

It is no wonder, therefore, that Aristotle spent two books of the *Ethics* on the subject of friendship. That he did so is in marked contrast with contemporary ethics where the question of friendship and its character is as overlooked as the analysis of the virtues.<sup>1</sup> We may think that happiness has some relation to questions of morality, but we seldom think an account of happiness requires such an extensive analysis of friendship. For Aristotle the exact opposite is the case. As we have seen, he believed a certain kind of self-knowledge, a practical wisdom, is necessary for the happy life. Without friendship, however, such knowledge is impossible. As John Cooper has pointed out, the person of character can come to know his own character only by studying that of his friend.

The presumption is that even an intimate friend remains distinct enough to be studied objectively; yet because one intuitively knows oneself to be fundamentally the same character as he is, one obtains through him an objective view of oneself. One recognizes the quality of one's own character and one's own life by seeing it reflected, as in a mirror, in one's friend.<sup>2</sup>

But to see why this is the case we must look more closely at Aristotle's analysis of "true friendship."

#### ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

Aristotle begins his account by distinguishing between three different kinds of friendship which correspond to three types of affection--useful, pleasant and perfect friendship.



In each of these the affection can be reciprocated so that the partner is aware of it, and the partners wish for each other's good in terms of the motive on which their affection is based. Now when the motive of the affection is usefulness, the partners do not feel affection for one another *per-se* but in terms of the good accruing to each from the other. The same is also true of those whose friendship is based on pleasure: we love witty people, not for what they are, but for the pleasure they give us. (Thus in these kinds of friendships) the friend is loved not because he is a friend, but because he is useful or pleasant. Thus, these two kinds are friendship only incidentally, since the object of affection is not loved for being the kind of person he is, but for providing some good or pleasure. Consequently, such friendships are easily dissolved when the partners do not remain unchanged: the affection ceases as soon as one partner is no longer pleasant or useful to the other (1156a9-20).

In contrast, perfect or true friendship is that "between good men who are like in excellence or virtue. For these friends wish alike for one another's good because they are good men, and they are good *per-se* (that is, their goodness is something intrinsic, not incidental)" (1156b5-10). Only this kind of friendship can be called such properly since the friendship is not based on incidental considerations and therefore is lasting. Just as the acts that appear virtuous are such only as they contribute to the life of one who has a firm and unchangeable character, so friendship is possible only to those whose life is not subject to change by good or bad fortune. Only such people are capable of friendship without qualification, "for in this kind of friendship the partners are like one another, and the other objects worthy of affection--the unqualified good and the unqualified pleasant--are also found in it, and these are the highest objects of affection" (1156b23-25).

It is important to note that Aristotle does not suggest that there are three kinds of friendship, for in the "primary and proper sense of the word, we call 'friendship' that which exists between good men as good men" (1156b31). Friendships of pleasure and use are called such only by analogy. For while they "bear some resemblance" to true friendship, they lack the essential characteristics necessary to genuine friendship. Thus it is impossible for bad people to be friends on the basis of pleasure and usefulness, but only good men can be friends based on what they are since only they are capable of finding joy in one another (1157a16-20).

Recently some have suggested that Aristotle has overstated his case insofar as well-wishing is a characteristic common to all forms of friendship. Unless friendship is construed in this larger sense it would seem that ordinary people, with the normal mixture of some good and some bad qualities of character, are not eligible to be friends.<sup>3</sup> Even more disturbing if rigorously pressed, Aristotle's account of true friendship makes one wonder if true friendship has or can ever exist.

While interesting in itself, the question of how to resolve how friendship of use and pleasure may be related to true friendship is not of immediate interest in terms of the issues before us. However, the issue of whether true friendship is a real possibility cannot be avoided. For unless true friendship is a possibility, Aristotle's whole account of the moral life risks becoming an idealistic abstraction. Moreover, I think by pressing the issue we will be able to see why Aristotle's account of the life of virtue entails a sense of journey.

Aristotle certainly never seems to imply that true friendship is an impossibility, though he does not think it common. That such is the case is not simply due to our limitations as virtuous agents, but also because of the very character of friendship. "To be friends with many people, in the sense of perfect friendship, is impossible, just as it is impossible to be in love with many at the same time. For love is like an extreme, and an extreme tends to be unique. It does not easily happen that one man finds many people very pleasing at the same time, nor perhaps does it easily happen that there are many people who are good. Also, one must have some experience of the other person and have come to be familiar with him, and that is the hardest thing of all. But it is possible to please many people on the basis of usefulness and pleasantness, since many have these qualities, and the services they have to offer do not take a long time" (1158a10-18). Thus, if friendship is based on virtue and the character of our friends, it is impossible to be a friend of many people. Rather "we must be content if we find even a few friends of this kind" (1171a17-20).

What then are we to make of Aristotle's claim that "friendship seems to hold states together" so that lawgivers even devote more attention to it than justice (1155a22). Indeed he goes further and observes that different forms of constitutions enhance different forms of friendships so that perverted forms of constitutions decrease or pervert true friendship (1160a30-1161b10). It would seem that the kind of friendship that holds states together can only be that of use or pleasure.

Yet it may be that such a suggestion is to take Aristotle's distinction between the three kinds of friendship too seriously; or perhaps put more accurately, Aristotle's account of true friendship is more complex than his initial distinction between the three kinds of friendship suggests. For, as he says,

it seems that friendship and the just deal with the same objects and involve the same persons. For there seems to be a notion of what is just in every community, and friendship seems to be involved as well. Men address as friends their fellow travelers on a voyage, their fellow soldiers, and similarly also those who are associated with them in other kinds of community. Friendship is present to the extent that men share something in common, for that is also the extent to which they share a view of what is just. And the proverb "friends hold in common what they have" is correct, for friendship consists in community (1159b25-30).

Yet it would be unjust to Aristotle's account to fasten on the contention that



friendship is present insofar as people share something in common, in the interest of defending him from a far too narrow treatment of friendship. It makes all the difference what it is they share in common. In this respect the issue of the possibility of true friendship is not unlike the question of the kind of constancy necessary for our becoming virtuous. Behind Aristotle's concern to limit true friendship to a few relations is to find a basis for friendship that can insure its stability.

That is why friendship requires equality between the friends. Such equality is not the same kind as that pertaining to matters of justice, that is, proportionate or quantitative equality, but rather is that established by virtue.

Friendship is equality and likeness, and especially the likeness of those who are similar in virtue. Because they are steadfast in themselves, they are also steadfast toward one another; they neither request nor render any service that is base. On the contrary, one might even say that they prevent base services; for what characterizes good men is that they neither go wrong themselves nor let their friends do so. Bad people, on the other hand, do not have the element of constancy, for they do not remain similar even to themselves (1159b4-12).

Thus, contrary to popular impressions, Aristotle does not assume that people must be strictly equal in status, power or position to be friends. Certainly he assumes that friendship between slave and free, man and woman, citizen and ruler are difficult, but they are not impossible since equality is that secured on the basis of virtue.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, therefore, friendship is not determined by the political, but friendship determines the political insofar as it is the purpose of good politics to make the life of virtue possible. Thus Aristotle observes sadly that in most states "each man lives as he pleases, dealing out law to his children and his wife as the Cyclopes do. Now the best thing would be to make the correct care of these matters a common concern. But if the community neglects them, it would seem to be incumbent upon every man to help his children and friends attain virtue. This he will be capable of doing, or at least intend to do" (1180a25-31). Thus friendship becomes for Aristotle his account of a true polity in the absence of any society ordered by a just constitution.<sup>5</sup>

For Aristotle, our task is not to become virtuous, thus establishing the kind of equality necessary for friendship and then to seek out friends. Rather, friendship itself is an activity necessary for us to acquire the kind of steadfastness necessary for our being true friends. True friendship is, therefore, not some ideal that actual friendships never achieve, but rather true friendship is a process that makes possible our becoming virtuous in a manner that transforms ourselves and our friendship. I suspect that is why Aristotle is so tolerant of the lesser forms of friendship. They at least have the potential of putting us on the road to virtue.

Equality is not a means to friendship, but rather friendship makes possible a kind of equality between good people. It is through friendship that we are further initiated into activity befitting virtue as we learn to be faithful to self

through being faithful to another. Social and personal inequalities can be made part of the "incidental" aspects of our existence through friendship as good men are made through participation in a common activity which is worthwhile in and of itself. That is why "when friendship is based on character, it does last, because it is friendship for its own sake, (in which each partner loves his friend for what he is)" (1164a11-13).

By calling friendship an activity, Aristotle means something as concrete as his account of the various virtues. Just as a virtue is not some means to an end, but is a skill necessary for people of character, so friendship is a skill that requires concrete expression if we are to benefit from it. Thus, while it is not impossible for friendships to exist when friends are absent from one another, if the absence lasts for a long time it can be the end of friendship. "For nothing characterizes friends as much as living in each other's company. Material advantage is desired by those who stand in need, but company is something which is wanted even by men who are supremely happy, for they are the least suited to live in isolation" (1157b19-20).

In order to understand Aristotle's account of friendship it is crucial to see that he is insisting that friendship is not just based on virtue, it is a virtue. Certainly friends must share something in common, but the problem with many kinds of friendship is that what is held in common is not lasting, so that when the project or trip is over so is the friendship. In contrast, Aristotle is insisting that what friends have in common is a certain kind of friendship that is only possible because of the kind of character they have. Friendship is both a characteristic and activity by which the agents become good through the activity itself (1168a5-7). Thus in loving a friend we also learn to love our own good.

For when a good man becomes a friend he becomes a good to the person whose friend he is. Thus, each partner both loves his own good and makes an equal return in the good he wishes for his partner and in the pleasure he gives him. Now friendship is said to be equality, and both those qualities inhere in the relationship between good men (1157b34-40).

Even though friendship is a relation, Aristotle does not assume that it is only possible in the presence of another. Indeed for us to be people capable of enjoying true friendship, we must be friends with ourselves. For as Aristotle suggests, we count as a friend:

(1) a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend's sake; or (2) a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend's sake. We regard as a friend also (3) a person who spends his time in our company and (4) whose desires are the same as ours, or (5) a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. A good man has all these feelings in relation to himself, (1166a1-10)



and thus, it makes perfect sense to suggest that we can be a friend to ourselves.

Indeed the matter must be put more strongly, for we not only can be a friend to ourselves, if we are people of character we must be our "own best friend and should have the greatest affection for himself" (1168b9). If we are not capable of being our own best friend we will lack exactly the constancy necessary to be men of character and thus cannot rightly be friends with others. That is why a wicked man cannot be a friend even of themselves because they have committed many crimes and run away from their lives. They seek the company of others with whom they can spend their days, but they avoid their own company as they are incapable of remembering their past and they fear their future (1166b10-25). In effect, they lack the means to see and have continuity between what they are and what they do. Friendship with ourselves makes constancy possible.

Therefore there can be no tension between our love for others and ourselves.<sup>6</sup> If we love ourselves rightly, that is as people of virtue, then we will rightly love others. As good people we should love ourselves, for such love is not the debased form of egoism that does everything for its own sake. The good person, therefore, will "wish to spend time with himself, for he does so with pleasure. The memory of his achievements gives him delight, and his hopes for the future are good" (1166a24). By being a friend with another, we are in fact friends with ourselves, since our "friend really is another self" (1166a31).

There is no doubt much wisdom in Aristotle's account of the necessity that we be friends with ourselves. Yet there are two problems that are not easily resolved. If loving another is but a form of self-love, then can we be said to be genuinely loving another as another? Aristotle is rightly concerned to provide an account of the moral prerequisites for friendship that make friendship endure across time and in the face of fortune. In many ways it is the same kind of problem of the kind of stability of self necessary to be a person of character. To supply such stability he wants to anchor friendship in a similar love of similar virtue--friendship, like virtue, becomes an activity that needs no reason to be. But as a result we miss any sense of what we think crucial to friendship--namely, learning to value another not because they are like us but because they are different from us.

This obviously has much to do with the issue I raised at the beginning concerning the necessity of friendship for self-knowledge that is crucial for our being virtuous. I think the above analysis has supported that contention, but there is still a question whether Aristotle has gone far enough. For if we need friends to know ourselves, how can we know what we are if there are no interesting differences between us and our friends? I suspect this problem relates to Aristotle's continuing Platonic assumption that there is a unity to the virtues, thus people of character will, insofar as they are moral, be the same. But if the virtues are capable of quite different arrangements within any one life, or if they may even conflict, then it seems that our friend may be quite different than we are. Moreover, such difference is not a sign of moral failure, but necessary if we are to know what we are.<sup>7</sup>

The second problem is but a form of the problem of difference between

friends. Aristotle rightly sees that it is crucial that friends should be able to rely on one another—I can trust you to be what you are. But he requires such a strong account of self-sufficiency in order to sustain trust that he comes close to denying the kind of vulnerability and mutuality we think necessary for friendship.<sup>8</sup> For example, Aristotle says people of virtue need friends because the “function of a friend is to do good rather than to be treated well, if the performance of good deeds is the mark of a good man and of excellence, and if it is nobler to do good to a friend than to a stranger, then a man of high moral standards will need people to whom he can do good” (1169b10-13). Or again he says that “friendship appears to consist in giving rather than in receiving affection” (1159a26).

His insistence on this point extends well beyond the doing of good deeds for our friend, however, as he suggests that a noble man prefers friends present during good, rather than bad, fortune. He does so because it is painful to see our friends “pained by our misfortunes, for everyone tries to avoid being the cause of a friend’s pain. For that reason, manly natures take scrupulous care not to let their friends share their pain” (1171b5-6). Whereas in good fortune,

the presence of friends brings with it a pleasant way of passing one’s time and the pleasant thought that they are pleased by the good we are enjoying. This is the reason for thinking that we ought to be eager to invite our friends to share our good fortunes, since it is noble to do good, and to be reluctant to ask our friend to share our misfortune, since one should let others participate as little as possible in what is evil. We should invite our friends to come to our side chiefly when a little trouble on their part will mean great benefit to us (1171b14-20).

We, thus, seem to have returned to Aristotle’s “high-minded man” who welcomes great risks because he desires to do good, but is ashamed to accept a good turn. He is so because by doing good he is able to put the other in his debt while providing himself with an added benefit (1124b7-18). There is much to be said for Aristotle’s realism as he is no doubt correct that many of our friendships have such a character. But there seems to be something deeply wrong with such realism as it runs counter to Aristotle’s central contention about the nature of friendship. For if the person of character can only be a friend by being “strong,” he or she seems to lack the means to share in the common activity Aristotle says is essential to friendship.

John Cooper argues, however, that Aristotle’s account of friendship inherently presupposes human vulnerability. Cooper characterizes Aristotle’s contention “that to know the goodness of one’s life, which he reasonably assumes to be a necessary condition of flourishing, one needs to have intimate friends whose lives are similarly good, since one is better able to reach a sound and secure estimate of the quality of life when it is not one’s own.”<sup>9</sup> Thus friendship is required because each of us left to our own devices cannot reach a secure estimate of our own moral character,



nor by ourselves can we find our lives continuously interesting and enjoyable, because the sense of the value of the activities that make them up is not within the individual's power to bestow. The sense of one's own worth is, for human beings, a group accomplishment. Hence we need each other because as individuals we are not sufficient--psychologically sufficient--to sustain our own lives.<sup>10</sup>

While I think Cooper is certainly right, he fails to address the main issue. The question is not whether we need friends because we are vulnerable, but whether we should not be the kind of people who will the presence of other people in a manner that makes us vulnerable to their presence. Aristotle wants to protect us and our friendship against the threat of fortune, time and change. He thus searches for the means to insure the stability of friendship by insuring that friends are in a sense "self-contained," but in the process friends lose exactly that which is necessary for friendship--the ability to accept not just gifts from our friend but friendship itself as a gift.

#### FRIENDSHIP IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to bring all this to a close, as well as to suggest what theological implications all this may have, I want to call your attention to another book on friendship--namely the Gospel of John. I think it is no accident that one of the climactic passages of John consists of Jesus admonishing the disciples in this manner,

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:7-17).

It is interesting that Jesus does not *ask* the disciples to be friends, but he *commands* them to be friends. By doing so He does not deny the affective nature of love, but indicates the kind of friendship He has in mind is of a different order than the normal run of things. It is a friendship made possible because through

His life a new order has come into being. An order that makes friendship possible not because we are alike, but because we are different. To learn to follow Jesus is the way we become friends of God. But what an extraordinary idea--for on what basis could it ever be possible for us to be God's friend?

It would seem that such friendship is possible only because God refuses to let our limitations determine His life. Thus we are told,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:16-18).

That is why Jesus speaks of giving us a new commandment even though on the surface it seems anything but new. We have known all along that we should love one another. Something like love, after all, is commended by many cultures and moral codes. But the love that is generally recommended is vastly different than the love that Jesus commands. The love he commands is "as I have loved you," that we can thus "love one another." For by this "all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

But how has Jesus loved us? He has loved us quite simply by making us His friends. He has done this because, unlike servants who do not know what the master is doing, He has made known to us all that the Father has willed. In effect, He has made us capable of friendship because He has made us agents in an ongoing history. He has made us agents because He has patiently forced us to learn to see the truth by transforming us to see a God who would love unrelentingly, even to having His son die that His kingdom might be a reality. Such love does not remove the difference between us and God, but rather makes our difference contribute to rather than prevent our friendship.

As we have seen, this is no easy lesson for us to learn. We prefer to be friends with a God who bears a closer resemblance to Aristotle's "high-minded man"--that is, a God who is always ready to help, to comfort, to love, but is never there to be helped, to be loved, or need our friendship. We want a God sufficient to Himself so that He needs no other friends than Himself. But that is not the kind of God we find through Jesus' life and death. Rather we find a God who graciously has provided us a place within His own life--a place that He refuses to revoke.

Thus Jesus unashamedly requires that we not only learn to love one another, but we should learn to love Him and love Him rightly (John 14:28). Learning to love God is the condition for our learning to love one another, for our learning to be friends. To be sure, our friendship with Jesus is not determined on our terms as we did not choose Him but rather He chose us. Nonetheless, we are thus given the privilege of loving God by continuing in the life initiated by Jesus.

Friendship is no less central to the moral life for John than for Aristotle. But



it is a friendship that is constant because He who has made us His friends is true in a way we can never be. Our constancy is not the result of our will, but rather because we and others find ourselves through participation in a common activity that makes us faithful both to ourselves and the other. That activity is not, as it almost seems to be in Aristotle, mutual enjoyment as an end in itself, but rather it is the activity of a task which we have been given. That task is nothing less than to participate in a new way of life made possible by the life of this man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The constancy necessary for friendship is transformed in the light of this task. It is not necessary to make the self impervious to the threats that accompany our love of another. Because our character is the result of a transformation that has been made possible by a gift, we are able to risk being present to others without feeling the need of protection. The constancy that Aristotle quite rightly sees as necessary for friendship turns out to be possible only if we are able through our lives to point to a source outside our lives that makes it possible. Or, put more directly, the constancy of our character is not finally "ours," but is the result of a relation that would be impossible without the willingness of God to always be there.

That is why, as Christians, we can risk the kind of partiality required by friendship. Friendship is not just an instance of some more universal love, it is the attention and regard for another precisely as they are other, as they are different, from ourselves. We can take the risk of such love because we are called to imitate the partiality of God's love for us as shown through His son. As Helen Oppenheimer has contended,

"Impartiality" is not a divine virtue, but a human expedient to make up for the limits of our concern on the one hand and the corruptibility of our affections on the other. If we find ourselves neglecting, or spoiling, or abusing, we need to be more even-handed and partiality becomes a vice; but the august partiality of God is a taking hold of the special character of each creature as uniquely significant.<sup>11</sup>

In short, God is able to love each creature as a friend without His love being diminished for any other creature. It is through our friendships formed by Christ that the Christian learns to participate in that love.

Friendship is not only a possibility but a necessity for Christians because we are an eschatological people that live by hope. That life is a journey is something that Aristotle sensed in his account of the life of happiness, virtue and friendship. But for Christians, life is not just a journey, but a journey of a very particular kind in which we are invited to be participants in a community of friends formed by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Such friends do not just love one another as mirror images of their own virtue, but rather they love one another in God. Friendship is a manifestation of hope, therefore, as hope but names the kind of journey to which Christians have been called that makes possible the risks of friendship.

As Aristotle saw clearly, friendship is a fragile business. We often enter into relations with one another before we can have the knowledge that the other is capable of being the kind of person suited to being a friend. This means, as Gilbert Meilaender says, "We may commit ourselves to persons for whom our regard may fade. Yet, in thus committing ourselves to another person, we create in that friend a set of expectations, needs and loyalties which cannot simply be set aside without pain and grief."<sup>12</sup> That is why Aristotle says even if we find that a friend we thought was good is not, we should not break off the friendship quickly if we think there is a chance to reform him (1165b12-20).

But for Christians, friendship, even with the enemy, must at least be offered as we have the basis to hope that such an offer can be used by God to create a new friend. We know that we may be disappointed in our friends, or even worse, we may disappoint a friend; but we also know that we are participants in a journey that can sustain us through our disappointments and hurts. We have been commanded to be friends with one another, that even though we are strangers to one another, friendship is possible. That is the way we bear fruit, for in that way the world can see how a people love one another and, even more, how happy that makes us.<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

1. Interestingly, the subject of friendship is beginning to receive renewed attention by philosophers and theologians. Gilbert Meilaender's book, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), was a pioneering study of the topic. As we have come to expect, Meilaender's book is gracefully written and filled with his usual insightfulness. I must admit, however, I have never been convinced that Meilaender's account of the tension between *agape* and *philia* is correct since I think such accounts of *agape* finally owe more to Kant than the gospel. Of equal note is Paul Wadell's *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Wadell's book not only has wonderful accounts of Aristotle and Aquinas on friendship but also deals with the question of our friendship with God. Finally Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) is an interesting attempt to employ friendship as an integral aspect of learning to read.
2. John Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 322.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 304
4. Aristotle is often criticized for his views on the inferior status of slaves and women, but he does not exclude the possibility of friendship between slaves (who are not by nature slaves) and women. Certainly he manifests his society's views on these matters, but it is also the case that his account is open to radical innovation on these matters through his analysis of friendship. Martha Nussbaum also thinks Aristotle's method in ethics makes him open to radical reconsideration of such issues. See *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University



Press, 1986), p. 258. See also Nancy Sherman's very interesting discussion of this issue in *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 153-155.

5. I find the last quote from Aristotle poignant in the light of our own political situation. Modernity involves the attempt to make political community possible between strangers. As a result, our polities are constantly tempted to fascist excesses because the state must supply the community that is missing. In effect, the only political alternative we have is friendship, particularly the friendship we call "church." The difficulty is that, given our political presuppositions, that form of friendship is not recognized as political but rather is said to be part of the "private" realm. One of the great social challenges for the church today is to discover how we can be a community that provides for the flourishing of friendship in a manner that can challenge the "politics" of our time.

6. The central problem of modern moral theory—that is, how to resolve the tension between egoism and altruism—is simply unknown to Aristotle. What we can now see is the very problem of egoism and altruism is not an eternal dilemma caused by something called the human condition, but rather is the result of changed social presumptions and practices that Aristotle could only see as corrupt. I am, moreover, sure Aristotle would be right to so understand the matter.

7. I suspect part of Aristotle's difficulty in this respect is related to the absence of any account of moral development. For moral development has to deal with the particularities of our histories as integral to our moral formation. The conceptual resources to give an account of our biographical situatedness was simply not available to Aristotle. To the extent one can extract from Aristotle an adequate account of moral development, Sherman has certainly done so in her *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 157-199. Of course, as MacIntyre makes clear in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), this issue becomes even more complex as soon as the Christian notion of sin is introduced (pp. 146-159).

8. However, as Amelie Rorty argues, "It has been thought that there is some problem in Aristotle's making friendship necessary to the well-lived life on the one hand, while at the same time emphasizing the priority of self-sufficient, self-contained *energeiai* on the other (1169b3-13). Self-sufficiency has of course nothing to do with isolation or even with self-development. A self-sufficient life is one whose activities are intrinsically worthy, have their ends in themselves, are worth choosing regardless of what may come of them. Aristotle is not concerned to justify friendship because it conduces to or promotes self-development but because it is part of a self-contained, fully realized life (1097b1-20). See "The Place of Contemplation" in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 389. See also Sherman's discussion (*The Fabric of Character*) on pp. 130-131.

9. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," p. 330.

10. Ibid., p. 331.

11. Helen Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness* (London: S. C. M., 1983), p. 131.

12. Meilaender, *Friendship*, p. 60.

13. I thank Mr. David Matzko for his help in the preparation of these essays for publication. I was gratified to be asked to deliver the 1988 Ryan Lectures at Asbury Seminary. I wish to thank all those who made comments and criticism at that time, as I learned much from them.



# Is Athens Revived Jerusalem Denied?

PHILIP L. QUINN

In his engaging reflections on the Aristotelian themes of happiness, virtue and friendship, Stanley Hauerwas extends and elaborates the pattern of his own ethical thought. He treats each of the three themes by first expounding Aristotle and then adding a theological postscript in which he suggests ways in which Aristotle's ethical thought might be appropriated by Christian ethics. The picture that emerges from this treatment is extremely generous to the pagan wisdom of Aristotle. Hauerwas gives the impression that Aristotle came close to being on target with respect to the ethical significance of happiness, virtue and friendship and so can be incorporated into Christian ethical thought with only minor modifications and a few additions.

I find this picture problematic. It seems to me to locate the center of gravity of Christian ethics too close to Athens and too far from Jerusalem. It also underestimates the extent to which Christian wisdom about the moral life can and should be seen as radically opposed to pagan wisdom. On many points of detail I have no quarrel with Hauerwas and find the crispness of his formulations and the shrewdness of his insights helpful. But I suspect that he and I would disagree sharply about fundamentals, for I am inclined to emphasize a different set of themes in trying to get at what is basic in Christian ethical thought. It is not that I have the temerity to suppose that Hauerwas is clearly mistaken in wanting to appropriate Aristotle. After all, Aquinas made a heroic effort to do just this, and he has had many followers among Christian theologians. It is rather that I am persuaded that other ways of understanding what is distinctive about Christian ethics are apt to yield deeper insights.

In these brief comments I can do no more than to sketch an alternative vision of what the fundamental themes of Christian ethical thought are and to indicate how they bear on the prospects for successfully appropriating Aristotle in the manner proposed by Hauerwas. To fix ideas about what is at stake in the conflict, I begin with some reflections on how the history of Western ethical thought

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should be narrated. I then discuss critically what Hauerwas has to say about happiness, virtue and friendship.

### THE HISTORICAL STAKES

Nietzsche has taught us that we construct genealogies for two purposes: to help us understand our origins and to lend legitimacy to what we propose to do next. Histories of ethics are genealogical narratives for ethical theorists. So we should expect there to be a particular reading of the history of ethics in the background of the project of incorporating Aristotle into Christian ethics.

Alasdair MacIntyre, who is cited often and approvingly by Hauerwas, provides a narrative that lends legitimacy to the enterprise of appropriating Aristotle for Christian ethics.<sup>1</sup> This story hinges on the attempt by Thomas Aquinas to incorporate an Aristotelian view of ethics into an Augustinian understanding of Christianity. The Thomistic synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine has for various reasons not fared well at the hands of liberal modernity, but the tradition it represents contains untapped resources for dealing with the ethical problems Christians confront today. The task now facing Christian ethics is, therefore, to recover and exploit the riches of that tradition. Reflection on its roots in Aristotle is the natural starting point for such a project, and so theological reflections on Aristotelian themes are an important contribution to advancing the discussion among Christian ethical theorists.

That, in outline, is one story, but of course there are others that can be told. The one I prefer is meant to yield a genealogy that lends legitimacy to the enterprise of reviving the divine command tradition of Christian ethics. Its roots are in the scriptural narratives of a God who is lavish in commanding His chosen people. In this narrative, the Thomistic project will be portrayed as an audacious but unsuccessful attempt to graft the alien stock of Aristotelian paganism onto Augustinian Christianity. The failure of the Thomistic synthesis in ethics becomes apparent long before the heyday of liberal modernity, with its secularizing tendencies. It is foreshadowed by the flourishing of a fairly radical form of divine command ethics in the thought of the later medievals; scholastic sources of this progressive development are to be found in Scotus, Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson and Gabriel Biel, among others.<sup>2</sup> The decisive event in this story is the Reformation. It liberates Augustinian Christianity by pruning away the alien stock that had been grafted onto it.

An ethics of divine commands is, at bottom, not an ethics of virtue but an ethics of duty. Divine commands impose obligations, and we who are commanded are bound to obey. So the great philosopher with whom divine command theorists can feel at home is not Aristotle but Kant. In a way, this is not at all surprising, since Kant's own moral sensibilities were shaped by the Lutheran Christianity of his culture. He tells us that "an ethical commonwealth can be thought of only as a people under divine commands, i.e., as a *people of God*, and indeed under *laws of virtue*."<sup>3</sup> Sin, he says, is "the transgressing of the moral law as a *divine command*."<sup>4</sup> Hence the task for Christian ethics today suggested by the story I have sketched is the assimilation of Kantian insights into the ongoing tra-



dition of divine command ethics. Aristotle, by contrast, is to be viewed from a considerable critical distance, though he will, to be sure, occasionally have something worthwhile to say. It is this kind of critical and skeptical eye that I propose to cast on Hauerwas's reflections on Aristotle.

I turn first to the question of happiness. Does the sort of human flourishing that Aristotle sets before us as an end comport well with Christian understandings of the great drama of sin and salvation?

### SIN, SALVATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FLOURISHING

The conviction that humans generally are not as God meant them to be, that human nature itself is fallen, is central to Augustinian Christianity. Based on the scriptural narrative of the fall of Adam and Eve, this conviction is fleshed out in various accounts of the doctrine of original sin constructed by theologians and philosophers. In the radical version of the doctrine proposed by Augustine himself, original sin is transmitted from Adam to his progeny by biological inheritance, yet it brings with it individual guilt despite the fact that it is innate. In the milder version proposed by Schleiermacher, the sinfulness innate in the individual "is the sufficient ground of all actual sins, so that only something else outside of him, and not anything new within him, is needed for the generation of actual sin."<sup>5</sup> In either case, humans left to themselves would not flourish in this life. Of course Augustinian Christianity is also convinced that humans have not been left to themselves; the incarnate Christ has superabundantly atoned for all human sin. Nevertheless such human flourishing as is possible involves a ceaseless struggle against interior evil. And it can never be a wholly human achievement but must always be at least in part a divine gift.

Contrast this grimly realistic assessment of the human moral situation with the optimistic paganism of Aristotle. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, Aristotle "holds that human beings are naturally drawn toward virtue rather than vice, love more than repudiation--and that, given sufficient education, material support, and personal effort, most people will be able to make good and reasonable lives *for themselves*" [my emphasis].<sup>6</sup> It is thus reasonable for Aristotle to think that human beings can, operating on their own steam, so to speak, flourish and so be happy over the course of an earthly lifetime. Would it be reasonable for Christians to share this thought? I think not.

It might seem that Hauerwas would disagree. He professes to take it that "fundamental to Christian convictions is the assurance that anyone who has followed the way of life we call Christianity will be able to look back on their life and say, 'I would not have it otherwise.'" But actually this remark is ambiguous because it fails to specify the standpoint from which such a retrospective assessment is to be performed. In Christian eschatological hope, there is such a standpoint. It is loving union with God in the afterlife; there human beings will reach the goal for which God created them; there they will truly flourish and be happy. From that point of view alone will it be possible to look back on one's life as an earthly pilgrim and wish it unchanged. Or, at any rate, so says Christian faith.

But that is not the standpoint from which Aristotle proposes to evaluate hu-

man lives. Aristotle's perspective allows him to see nothing beyond completed earthly lives, and so he must judge flourishing and happiness in secular terms. From this point of view, it is quite reasonable to insist that good fortune is a prerequisite for human flourishing, for the activities that, according to Aristotle, constitute a happy life are not possible in the absence of such conditions as good health and a modicum of wealth. Christianity's larger vision makes other possibilities available. Misfortune, far from ruling out ultimate happiness, may prove a blessing in disguise if it enables the one who suffers it to draw closer to the suffering Christ in love. Providence may be giving to the wretched of the earth--those suffering most desperately from poverty and disease--opportunities that the comfortable would envy if they saw things in their true colors. This is a familiar litany, but it is very remote from Aristotle's way of seeing things. At least some lives in which Aristotle would not be able to find happiness will nevertheless, if the Christian promise is true, be crowned with a kind of happiness he at best only dimly imagines.

So I see a gulf that amounts to an abyss between Aristotle and Augustinian Christianity on the question of happiness. For Aristotle, it is a secular human achievement in favorable material circumstances; for Augustinian Christianity, it is an otherworldly hope and must ultimately be a divine gift. This disagreement is bound to be reflected in further differences in the way ethics is conceived in the two traditions. We may therefore expect Aristotle and Augustinian Christianity to disagree sharply over the place of the virtues in the moral life and even over which traits are genuine virtues. I propose next to argue that such expectations are not going to be disappointed.

#### WHOSE VIRTUES?

As has often been noted, the virtues suffer from severe cultural relativity. To be sure, there may be some character traits such as prudence that everyone needs in order to live well, but the sort of industriousness needed for flourishing in a bourgeois mercantile society would be out of place in a traditional African culture. So we should expect there to be only partial overlap between Aristotle's virtues and the Christian virtues. This is exactly what we find. And the differences go much deeper than the fact that many Christians would supplement Aristotle's list of virtues by adding to it the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

It is striking that Aristotle does not even include piety in his long list of virtues. Nussbaum conjectures that "this probably indicates his interest in separating practical reason from religious authority, and in keeping reason, rather than such authorities, in control of the most important matters."<sup>7</sup> Augustinian Christians, who hold that human reason was enfeebled but not utterly corrupted by the fall of Adam and Eve, will quite properly be skeptical of such naive confidence in the ability of human practical reason to rule well in the most important matters. Moreover, Aristotle clearly would not have counted as blessed all the people Jesus did: the poor in spirit, the sorrowing, the lowly, those who hunger and thirst for holiness, the merciful, the simple-hearted, the peacemakers, and



those who are persecuted for holiness's sake (Matthew 5:3-10). Not all such people would have flourished in ancient Athenian society, but Jesus promises them a great reward in heaven.

Aristotle differs from Augustinian Christians not only in what he fails to praise but also in what he praises. As Hauerwas points out, Aristotle's high-minded man welcomes great risks because he desires to do good but is ashamed to accept a good turn; "he is so because by doing good he is able to put the other in his debt while providing himself with an added benefit." Aristotle shows his astuteness as an observer of human psychology in noticing that those who regard themselves as self-sufficient find it easier to give than to receive. But Augustinian Christians should, I think, look on Aristotelian high-mindedness as a manifestation of vice rather than of virtue. It bespeaks sinful pride, if not serious self-deception, not to acknowledge that we cannot be self-sufficient, that we need divine gifts if we are to have even a chance of overcoming interior evil and attaining happiness. Hauerwas is, of course, aware of the strains in Christian thought that would support such a judgment. In a footnote, he cites a passage in which Gilbert Meilaender speaks of "the Christian emphasis on grace, the sense of the sinner's constant need of forgiveness, and the belief that we can have no claims upon the freedom of God."<sup>8</sup> He does not, in my opinion, fully appreciate how deeply alien the Aristotelian emphasis on self-sufficiency is to this way of thinking.

But it is at another, more theoretical level that the deepest difference between Aristotle's conception of the virtues and the divine command moralist's conception emerges. For Aristotle, the virtues hold pride of place in ethical theory. They are not properly understood as dispositions to produce independently defined or recognizable good actions or states of affairs; rather good actions or states of affairs are defined as those a virtuous person would voluntarily produce. From the point of view of the divine command theorist, Aristotle has got things backwards. The will of God, the commands that express it, and the moral laws those commands establish are primary for ethics, and so obligations to obey moral laws will be the fundamental facts of morality. Virtues will be construed as dispositions to obey various divine commands, and the virtue of obedience itself will be at center stage. Indeed, even Aquinas, who follows Aristotle as far as he thinks he safely can, allows that obedience is the greatest of the moral virtues and that all acts of virtue, insofar as they come under a precept, belong to obedience. He says that "properly speaking, the virtue of obedience, whereby we condemn our own will for God's sake, is more praiseworthy than the moral virtues, which condemn other goods for the sake of God."<sup>9</sup> This is, I take it, a far cry from Aristotle.

Yet it is part of Christian thought's legacy to modernity, transmitted by way of a Kantian morality of duty, that it seems perfectly natural to many people to think of the virtues as secondary to laws, principles or rules. Hauerwas notes this in passing by remarking in a footnote that most philosophers and theologians who write about ethics still "treat the virtues as dependent on more 'principled' approaches to ethics." In a way, it is puzzling to find secular moral philosophers



doing this. Such puzzlement seems to lie behind Elizabeth Anscombe's celebrated claim that it is not possible to have a law conception of ethics "unless you believe in God as a lawgiver."<sup>10</sup> And Bernard Williams, who displays a certain amount of sympathy for Aristotle, regards morality, whose purest and deepest representation he finds in Kant's ethics of moral obligation, as something we would be better off without. Alluding to American slavery, he styles morality "the peculiar institution," though he admits that it is "the outlook, or, incoherently, part of the outlook, of almost all of us."<sup>11</sup> Doubtless our Judeo-Christian heritage helps explain why a morality of laws and obligations to obey them is a part of our outlook, and I confess to feeling a great allegiance to morality so understood. I also suspect that this is a point at which Christians may be called upon to take a stand against those who, like Williams, would like to liberate us from morality. Such a stand would, as I see it, also be a stand against Aristotle's notion of the virtues and their primacy in ethical life.

So another abyss yawns between Aristotle and Augustinian Christianity on the questions of what the virtues are and of whether they are fundamental in the moral life. Perhaps the quarrel is at its sharpest over the nature of authority. If Nussbaum is right, Aristotle's view is that ethical authority lies with human practical reason and religious piety is not a virtue in the moral sphere. For Augustinian Christianity, ethical authority resides in the divine will commanding and religious obedience is the greatest of moral virtues. And, as we shall next see, the urgency of God's claims on us will make it difficult, if not impossible, for Augustinian Christians to go along with Aristotle's account of the importance of human friendships.

#### WHICH FRIENDSHIPS?

Jesus commanded His followers to love the Lord their God with their whole hearts, with their whole souls, and with all their minds (Matthew 22:37). He immediately added that they should love their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:39). It seems that there is tension, if not outright conflict, between these two commands. If we are required to devote ourselves wholeheartedly and totally to love of God, then we may not have left over time or energy enough to do a proper job of loving either self or neighbor. So perhaps Christians will have to confront hard choices between divine friendship and human friendships of certain sorts. This is what Robert M. Adams calls the problem of total devotion.<sup>12</sup> Total devotion to God appears to press us in the direction of exclusive devotion to God.

Augustine responds to the pressure by downplaying the importance of human friendships. In a famous but troubling passage, he cites the commandment to love the neighbor and goes on to ask whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake or for the sake of something else. Appealing to a distinction between enjoyment and use, he says: "If for his own sake, we enjoy him; if for the sake of something else, we use him."<sup>13</sup> Augustine then registers his own conviction that man is to be loved for the sake of something else, from which it follows that human love of self and others should be a matter of use. Referring back to the



commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind, Augustine remarks that God "did not leave any part of life which should be free and find itself room to desire the enjoyment of something else."<sup>14</sup> And from this it follows that human love of self and others should not be a matter of enjoyment. So it appears that for Augustine friendships among humans are to be restricted to the realm of the useful.

This position stands in sharp contrast to Aristotle's views on human friendship. As Hauerwas points out, Aristotle holds that the highest form of human friendship obtains between good people who are alike in excellence or virtue. In such friendships between virtuous equals, the friends find joy in one another. Utility friendships and pleasure friendships are, for Aristotle, only inferior forms of friendship; indeed, they are only called friendship by analogy because they bear some resemblance to virtue friendships. Aristotle's ideal of friendship transcends the bounds of the useful and makes room for equals in virtue to enjoy and take pleasure in one another's good qualities of character.

Even Augustinian Christians may not wish to adopt Augustine's own severe attitude toward human friendships, and so perhaps the stark contrast between Augustine and Aristotle on this point can be mitigated if not entirely eliminated. One way for Christians to proceed, it seems to me, is to suppose that God wishes us to love ourselves and our neighbors as He loves them. Lacking nothing, God does not love His creatures because they are useful to Him but for their own sakes; knowing that His creation is good, God delights in it. If we do likewise, it will not interfere with whole-hearted devotion to God but will strengthen it by uniting us more closely to Him in shared activity. Thus, Augustine notwithstanding, God did leave a part of life free for loving creatures for their own sakes and for enjoying one another. Total devotion to God does not entail exclusive devotion to God because our love should diffuse itself over the whole of creation as His does. In this respect, Francis of Assisi is the exemplary Christian saint.

But this line of thought, though it softens the clash between Aristotle and Augustinian Christianity in one way, only serves to heighten the contrast between them in another. Aristotle restricts the highest kind of friendship to good people who are equal in virtue and insists that we must be satisfied with only a few friends of this kind. This does not mean, as Hauerwas takes pains to emphasize, that Aristotelian virtue friendships are limited by gender or social class, for man and woman, slave and free can be equal in virtue. It does mean, however, that Aristotle's ideal of friendship is much less inclusive than the ideal of love of neighbor if that Christian ideal is understood, as the parable of the Good Samaritan suggests it should be, to imply that our love of one another should be a reflection, albeit a pale one, of God's love for us. Surely God's love is not restricted to His equals in excellence or virtue. If it were, it would not reach out beyond the boundaries of the Trinity to seek us. And plainly God's love is not limited to the virtuous among His human creatures. If there is no love between God and a human creature, it is not because God has not offered love but because the creature has refused it. The atoning work of Christ's suffering and death is, after all, a gift to all humankind. If that is the paradigm we are to imi-



tate, then Christian love of neighbor must be on offer to all and cannot be confined, without being stunted in its growth, to the narrow circle of one's equals in virtue. No doubt space can be made inside the realm of Christian love for something like Aristotle's virtue friendships as well as for other attractive forms of interpersonal bonding. What needs to be emphasized, however, is that Christian love lays on us much more extensive and stringent demands than Aristotelian friendship does.

"It is interesting," Hauerwas notes near the end of his discussion of friendship, "that Jesus does not ask the disciples to be friends, but he commands them to be friends." Indeed, it is interesting; but from my point of view it is not surprising. Hauerwas is commenting on the passage in Christ's last discourse which says: "The command I give you is this, that you love one another" (John 15:17). It is easy to see how Aristotelian friendships between equals in virtue could arise spontaneously and naturally. According to the old saw, like is attracted to like, and virtue friendships are defined as relationships between those alike in their excellences. But even Christ's first disciples were a mixed bag, and his followers today are a very motley crew. So the requirement that they love one another will not necessarily square with their natural inclinations and must have the constraining force of a command. There is, however, nothing special about this case. As Augustinian Christians see it, our moral obligations are generally contrary to the rebellious tendencies of the Old Adam within us; and as we divine command theorists would insist, they are imposed on us by a God who by right lays down the law for us.

## CONCLUSION

In biology, taxonomists are often divided into lumpers and splitters. Lumpers stress similarities and downplay differences; splitters draw attention to differences and deemphasize similarities. Those who, like Aquinas and Hauerwas, wish to appropriate Aristotle's pagan wisdom for Christian ethical thought tend to be lumpers. These comments should make it very clear that I am a splitter by temperament. Wishing to highlight what is distinctive in Christian ethical thought, I picture Aristotle as deeply alien to it and so find attempts to assimilate his pagan wisdom to Augustinian Christianity problematic at best. I think Aristotle should be read with suspicion by Christian theologians and philosophers. But Christian ethics is the property of a community, not of a single individual. If the community is to learn to correct for the tendencies to exaggerate manifest in the work of both lumpers and splitters, it will have to discover how to give due weight to both similarities and differences between Athens and Jerusalem. So we splitters should be grateful for the work of lumpers like Hauerwas; such work provides a counterweight to our propensities to make too much of differences. And, speaking personally, though I continue to disagree with Hauerwas over matters of substance and emphasis of the sort I have endeavored to bring to the fore in these comments, it is only fair to conclude by acknowledging that thinking about his reflections on Aristotle's ethics has helped me to clarify and deepen my own vision of what Christian ethics is and should be.



## Notes

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice: Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
2. For selected texts, see Janine Marie Idziak, ed., *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979).
3. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, tr. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 91.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
5. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 286.
6. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* (December 7, 1989), p. 40.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. x.
9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 104, 3.
10. Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Collected Papers; Volume III: Ethics, Religion, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 30.
11. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 174.
12. Robert Merrihew Adams, "The Problem of Total Devotion," *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. R. Audi and W. J. Wainwright (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 169-194. I have found this excellent paper very helpful in clarifying my own thoughts on the problem.
13. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1, 22, 20.
14. *Ibid.*, 1, 22, 21.





# Athens May Be a Long Way From Jerusalem But Prussia Is Even Further

STANLEY HAUERWAS

I am indebted to Philip Quinn for putting me in a new predicament. Usually I am accused of being a radical Christian voice that overemphasizes God's redemption so that the created order is undervalued. My emphasis on the distinctive character of Christian ethics is alleged to make impossible any attempt to benefit from non-Christian wisdom. But according to Quinn the problem is exactly the reverse as I come close to domesticating the radical nature of the gospel of Christ by making Aristotle part of the Christian tradition. Caught between these unhappy characterizations I can only think I am either very confused or, given the intellectual options of modernity, what I am about is not easily understood. I suspect there is some truth in both characterizations, but I am going to try to clear up some of the confusions by responding to Quinn.

I must begin by rejecting Quinn's own self-description as a "splitter." The very distinction between "lumpers" and "splitters" is one generated by one well initiated into intellectual practices of lumping. I do not say that in criticism, for as Quinn points out, any significant attempt at ethical theory--which is not the same thing as attempts to illumine how we should live as Christians--will entail a genealogical narrative that inevitably lumps. My problem is not that Quinn is a lumper, but rather that I find his narrative unbelievable.

His story goes something like this: Things were going well for Christians as long as they followed God's commands and asked for forgiveness when they disobeyed those commands. This lasted for approximately the first four centuries of Christian history and climaxed in the thought of Augustine. However, Christians became attracted to pagan thinkers and the result was a terrible loss of Christian insight. While there was some hope in later scholastic sources, the decisive redis-

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covery of Christian morality occurred in the Reformation and climaxed in the eighteenth century with Kant. This renewal of Christian ethics, however, has not fared well in modernity. It now becomes our task as Christians to preserve ethics of duty in a liberal culture based on utilitarianism.

To begin, I think it extraordinary that Quinn seems to believe that the great alternatives are between something called "paganism" and "Augustinian Christianity." Does he really believe that Augustine represents Christianity that has not already been shaped by pagan influences? Augustine, after all, was not exactly innocent of Platonism. Why is Platonic paganism good but Aristotelian paganism bad? Moreover, the very appeal to Augustine as the great hero of Quinn's story is odd since Augustine's display of the Christian life in *The Morals of the Catholic Church* is in the language of the virtues--admittedly all as forms of love, but still a long way from Kant's ethic of duty qua duty.

I confess that I prefer Aristotle's account of the virtues to that of Plato because, as I tried to show in my articles, Aristotle's account of the virtues as habits inextricably requires an account of temporality. (It may well be true, as MacIntyre argues, that the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's account of the moral life has been overdrawn. Yet certainly the Plato that Augustine learned through neo-Platonism was far from Aristotle's account of the virtues.) Such timefulness, I think, at least provides an opening for Christian appropriation of the virtues now determined by the story we tell of Jesus of Nazareth. Platonic accounts of Christianity always tend toward gnosticism as Jesus simply becomes an exemplar of prior existing truth. Interestingly, it is Aristotle that allows for a decisive reconstitution of the virtues as well as their individuation as determined by faithfulness to Jesus.

So, ironically, my attempt to use the "pagan" Aristotle was in the interest of my more determinative theological interest in displaying how the Christian conviction that Jesus is God's messiah requires a radical revision of Aristotle's understanding of the virtues. Yet such a radical revision is still a revision as God does not redeem us in the abstract but as people who are constituted in and by concrete histories. It is my sense that Aristotle's account of the virtues, and in particular how the virtues are interrelated to happiness and friendship, can help Christians understand better how we are called to live as disciples of Jesus.

Yet I must acknowledge that there are other, equally possible, accounts of how we should live as Christians that make no mention of Aristotle and/or the virtues. It is not as if the New Testament is devoid of the language of virtue,<sup>1</sup> but discipleship is surely a more prominent category. The crucial issue is not whether virtue or command is more determinative, but rather whether whatever conceptual alternative we use helps us as Christians to be more faithful disciples. What must be acknowledged, however, is that there is no "pure" Christianity anywhere--particularly in the New Testament and/or Augustine.

Of course Quinn is right that Aristotle has no conception of sin, but the problem with Quinn's way of putting the matter is that it makes it appear that sin is the first word Christians have to speak about the moral life. Our first word is not sin, but that Jesus is the Christ. Our sin can only be known in the light of Jesus'



cross. That is why the gospel is good news and proclamation. Christ did not come to condemn the world, but to save it--we are only condemned because we are first saved.

Ironically, Quinn's understanding of sin, as well as the status he gives it, is not unlike Protestant liberal theology's attempt to make sin a form of natural theology. No longer believing that all creation is intelligible only as it manifests God's glory, Protestants retreated to sin as a natural category that could be known abstracted from Christ. Of course the great paradigm of this is Quinn's hero--Immanuel Kant. I suspect that Quinn thinks he can have Kant's account of duty and sin without having Kant's account of Jesus in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. If so, he certainly owes us an account of that neat trick. For Kant, sin is a more determinative reality than the Jesus who is, for Kant, but the exemplification of the archetype already present to reason. Kant and Plato alike have no place for truth that is historically contingent.

None of this is meant to deny that sin is a crucial issue for how we think of these matters. As Quinn notes, Martha Nussbaum, in her recent review of MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, criticizes MacIntyre for taking seriously the Christian doctrine of sin.<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum's account of Augustine's understanding of sin as sexual desire is badly off target as well as how she understands the relation of sin, rationality and authority. Nonetheless she has put her finger on one of the fundamental issues between Christians and the ethos of modernity. For she is quite right to suggest that the project of modernity to secure moral agreement through the construction of common norms requires the suppression of the Christian confession of sin. Yet she, like Quinn, seems to assume that sin is intelligible separate from the more determinative witness we make as Christians that our existence is determined for the enjoyment of God forever made sure through the resurrection of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

What I find so troubling about Quinn's appeal to a "morality of duty" is his failure to see that there is no "divine command tradition of Christian ethics." Indeed I think we would be hard pressed to discover such a tradition in Christianity before Kant. To be sure, there are commands of all kinds and types through the Christian Scriptures, but they are never assumed to be intelligible separate from the story of what it means to be Israel and/or the Church. Commands, like the virtues, require a narrative context for their intelligibility. I, along with many others, have argued this time and time again, but it seems to have no effect for those determined that the Scriptures are best read through Kantian eyes.

In that respect I think Quinn is right to see the Reformation as playing a decisive role. But it is not as he would have it, namely that the Reformers liberated Augustinian Christianity from pagan influences, but rather that the Reformation began the process that handed the authority of the Church to the secular state. This was certainly not what the Reformers intended, but it was the inevitable result of the divorce of scriptural authority from the magisterial authority of the Church. The ethics of duty becomes the theological necessity for assuring the obedience of the individual to state control. That Protestant ethics was so shaped but a manifestation of the inability of Protestantism to challenge the idolatry



intrinsic to the rise of the modern nation state. That the moral life of Protestants, particularly in the United States, has been degraded into forms of bourgeois self-fulfillment is ironically the result of the development of duty-formed ethics abstracted from any account of goods necessary for our flourishing.<sup>4</sup> So if Quinn is unhappy with liberal modernity, I suggest he ought to remember the immortal words of Pogo--"We have met the enemy and he is us."

Quinn cannot, of course, be held accountable for failing to intuit the political agenda that is the background to my articles on Aristotle, since I certainly did not make that explicit. Yet the very way I tried to interrelate happiness, the life of virtue, and friendship was meant to suggest why those themes are so destructively separated by our current political arrangements. I should have thought that Quinn might have noticed how Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between politics and friendship is a decisive challenge to liberal political regimens that thrive on the Kantian presumptions that the primary moral issue is how to secure fair relations between strangers. To be a community capable of fostering friendships, as I believe the Church is and should be, is a significant political witness in such a world.

I must admit that Quinn's general argument about the necessity to provide a genealogy of "ethics" does raise a challenge to which I am unsure how to respond. He rightly associates me with the narrative MacIntyre tells of the Christian appropriation of Aristotle. What concerns me is not whether this is a paganization of Christianity, but rather whether grand narratives such as MacIntyre constructs do not remain committed to some form of Constantinian Christianity and, thus, legitimate forms of dominations antithetical to Christian friendship. This remains a challenge to me. I am convinced there is no way around such narratives if we are to resist the powers of modernity. Yet I fear those very narratives may become the master rather than the servant to the gospel. That is why MacIntyre's argument about Aquinas's method of disputation is necessary for any account of Christian truth is so important. That "method" makes clear that Christians believe that "reason" is an ongoing process in which even the weakest member must have a voice.

That is why I find Nussbaum's critique of MacIntyre's account of practical rationality as authoritarian so bizarre. In *After Virtue* where MacIntyre used the example of chess, Nussbaum suggests he still has a place for critical reason, but by employing the hockey player example in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre allegedly wishes people to be characterized by unthinking conformity. Nussbaum's argument not only betrays a shocking ignorance of the skill required to pass a hockey puck at the right time and in the right manner, but even more she does not appreciate how rationality but names the process by which a community discovers the goods in common. In spite of her illuminating account of Aristotle, Nussbaum, in some of her work, continues to hanker after an account of "critical reason" more characteristic of Kant than Aristotle. It may be that MacIntyre's account of rationality is too "rationalistic," but at least he begins the process of helping us recover an account of rationality as correlative to social process. For Christians this at least means that our convictions will, of course,



appear arbitrary when we are less than a people formed to be friends of God and one another.

The issues Quinn raises concerning the relation of friendship and love are not easily sorted out. I certainly would not want to suggest that the Christian obligation to love the neighbor is the same as becoming the neighbor's friend. However, I think it equally important to resist construal of Christian *agape* in terms of the Kantian notion of disinterestedness that has been so prevalent in modern theology and ethics. Impartial love is not love but false egalitarianism that threatens the being of one so "loved."

In terms of Quinn's more particular criticism of the position I tried to develop, I am content to let the articles speak for themselves. I am grateful to him for providing me the opportunity to at least suggest the larger agenda behind them. Though I am unhappy with the current disciplinary distinction between theology and philosophy, I suspect behind this disagreement between Quinn and myself lies the difference between the theologian and the philosopher.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. See, for example, my "On Developing Hopeful Virtues," *Christian Scholars Review*, 2 (December, 1988): 107-117.
2. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *New York Review of Books*, 36 (December 7, 1989): 36-41.
3. For my further reflections on Nussbaum's quite extraordinary project see my "Can Aristotle Be a Liberal: Nussbaum on Luck," *Soundings* (forthcoming).
4. Quinn, I think, fails to appreciate how Kant's account of autonomy manifested as well as spawned the kind of individualism that has made the growth of the authoritarian state inevitable. Ironically, the more autonomy we have as individuals the more we need the 'command' of the state to produce any semblance of order.
5. I am indebted to David Matzko and Philip Kenneson for their suggestions for how I might respond to Quinn. I am, in particular, indebted to Mr. Matzko for the title of this response.





## Book Review Article

# Taking Time for the Trivial[:] Reflections on Yet Another Book from Hauerwas

PHILIP D. KENNESON

Stanley M. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between*. Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1988.  
ISBN 0-939464-48-9

For Lent I gave up writing book reviews. Most readers will assume that such a decision hardly demanded a sacrifice, but they would be sadly mistaken, for I am currently suffering from a malaise common to post-prelim graduate students know as DAH (pronounced "duh")--Dissertation Avoidance Hysteria. No cure currently exists for DAH, and so those of us who suffer from it must resort to treating the symptoms: frequent headaches, uncontrollable stuttering when queried about either the topic of our dissertations or progress recently made, and unbounded enthusiasm for any and every project that may divert us from our appointed task. And so in order to survive a disease that can easily metastasize and infect every area of one's life (and which in some cases is terminal), I've taken to popping aspirin, practicing silence and eschewing the writing of book reviews.

That is, I did so until I read Stanley Hauerwas's latest offering.

I should perhaps explain, since the reasons for ending my self-imposed moratorium, even at great risk to my future well-being, might easily be misinterpreted. I decided to write this review not because I believed Hauerwas's most recent musings were so profound that I simply had to get the word out. Nor did I

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undertake this project merely to be able to add yet another entry to my impressive list of publications appearing in prestigious journals. Rather, I embarked on this mission because Hauerwas taught me an important lesson: that Christians are called to be a people who have (or create) time for the trivial. This insight (to which I will later return) struck me as so revolutionary that I decided to incorporate it into my way of life. Hence, when I was approached by the editor of this journal to offer some reflections on *Christian Existence Today*, I thought to myself: "How better to embody concretely my new found appreciation for and commitment to the trivial?"

Before I proceed to important matters, perhaps I may appropriately begin with a somewhat trivial aside. As his students know, Hauerwas refers to this collection rather affectionately as *Christian Existence Yesterday*, since the editor of Labyrinth Press (who will remain anonymous) possessed the manuscript for no trivial amount of time before he was able to bring it out. Of course, Hauerwas was inhibited from asking for a title change, for to have done so would have obscured his allusion to Barth's short tract, *Theological Existence Today*. Some cynical readers, undoubtedly, will deny that the two works have anything in common ("I knew Karl Barth. Karl Barth was a friend of mine...."). The one possible exception might be the length of time taken to write each: Barth makes no secret that his work was written over a single weekend.

Concerning more important matters, let me begin by noting that, not surprisingly, many of the issues that arise in this latest collection of essays are those which Hauerwas's readers have come to expect: virtue, narrative, practical reason, moral formation and peace. But it would be a mistake to assume from this that *CET* is merely another attempt by Hauerwas to use these notions to launch his latest diatribe against the poverty of American Christian ethics. Rather, like most of us, the more he writes about these matters, the more clarity and precision he attains. Since Hauerwas rightly believes that thinking and writing should normally not be distinguished, those who have read his works to this point have had the opportunity to "see" him think through these issues. Hauerwas readily admits that his "project" remains unfinished (and is therefore inadequately characterized as a "project"), and whatever advances it provides depend on the dialogical character of his discourse. That is, Hauerwas, more than some authors, wants and needs his readers and critics. This willingness to allow others to look over his shoulder stems from his belief that having the right "position" or "answer" is not enough; a person must be clear about how she got there. Otherwise, there is no way of knowing whether one has arrived at "the same" position or not, or whether one has arrived anywhere at all. None of this, of course, is meant to imply that Hauerwas's latest book finally clarifies everything; however, there are several aspects of his thinking that are presented with a good deal more lucidity, and as such have the potential to help us understand more clearly what Hauerwas is about. Perhaps the biggest payoff of such clarity is that it may make it possible for us to know better how to have a disagreement with him.

Of course, Hauerwas would approve of this, for he is in the business of engendering disagreement. Hence, it is quite fitting that Hauerwas introduces his lat-



est collection by responding to the now well-known accusation leveled by his former teacher and long-time friend, James Gustafson. For those unfamiliar with the details, Gustafson accuses Hauerwas of succumbing to the so-called "sectarian temptation." This temptation, according to Gustafson, stems from the fact that Christianity's identity is threatened by the pluralism that marks contemporary societies. As a result, this threat naturally generates a conservative, or sectarian, reaction that attempts to regain a distinct sense of identity for Christianity by resorting to a strategy of "sectarian withdrawal." This withdrawal is buttressed by Hauerwas and others whose theoretical positions, according to Gustafson, entail "theological fideism" and "sociological tribalism."

Hauerwas acknowledges that part of his reason for beginning with his disagreement with Gustafson is to provide a touchstone for the remainder of the book; that is, readers will be able to test his "defense" of his position in the introduction against the constructive proposals that are displayed throughout the book. But perhaps more importantly, Hauerwas's introduction reminds readers that what is at stake in reading and responding to arguments is not so much "defending" this or that "position"; rather, it is coming to understand that persons are often "captured" by certain habits of mind and life that deeply affect the way they see the world. Thus, Hauerwas shows his readers that to disagree with Gustafson involves not merely *denying* the latter's charges of sectarianism, tribalism, fideism, irresponsibility and the like, but more basically coming to conceptual clarity about why Gustafson "sees" the problems in these terms to begin with, and subsequently, why one perhaps might want to deny Gustafson's descriptions. In short, Hauerwas's introduction helps the reader understand one of the primary philosophical issues that Hauerwas variously displays throughout his book: arguments, including moral arguments, cannot be separated from the descriptions that not merely accompany them, but make them possible. Hence, moral argument often entails the complex process of persuading an audience that they need not, perhaps even must not, accept the first stage of any argument; indeed, perhaps the only stage necessary to throw into relief what is at issue, is re-description.

So Hauerwas carefully sketches out in his introduction, and then further suggests in his later chapters, why he rejects Gustafson's characterization of his position. Hauerwas begins by admitting that if his "position" is a temptation, he hopes people will succumb to it; however, he rejects Gustafson's notion that giving in to such a temptation necessarily opens one to the charge of "sectarianism." Hauerwas rightly notes that such a charge begs the very epistemological and sociological questions that are at issue, while appearing to stand above them. In other words, the charge of sectarianism often serves as a cipher for little more than a "you are wrong not to take responsibility for the world in the way that I do." In other words, such a charge serves to mask the fact that how the Church understands and exercises its responsibility to the world is precisely the point at issue, and one on which Hauerwas has written at length. That Hauerwas is weary of having those arguments summarily dismissed as "sectarian" is evident in his passionate rebuttal to those who have leveled such charges: "Show me where I



am wrong about God, Jesus, the limits of liberalism, the nature of the virtues, or the doctrine of the church--but do not shortcut that task by calling me a sectarian" (p. 8).

Similarly, Hauerwas argues that Gustafson's charge of "irresponsibility" wrongly presupposes that Christians must take up an "all or nothing" attitude toward a "given" society. That Hauerwas rejects such a view is attested to by one of the themes that runs throughout this collection (and many of his other writings): That part of what the Church is called to be is a people of virtue capable of making judgments about what it can and cannot affirm about the society in which it finds itself. "The issue," Hauerwas asserts, "is how the church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation" (p. 11). Such interpretive categories, in turn, are only "available" if the community sustains certain practices that are capable of throwing into relief those aspects of a society which they cannot affirm. For example, Hauerwas believes that Christian communities must denounce the state's willingness to resort to violence, but they can only do so to the extent that they embody that virtue which is essential for their life and witness to the world, the virtue of peacemaking.

Although Hauerwas has written much on this in the past, his brief essay "Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church" contains perhaps his most clear and succinct thinking on why this virtue must remain integral for all communities who purport to follow Jesus. This essay, which consists of his extended reflections on Matthew 18:15-22, helpfully displays the relationship between the virtue of peacemaking and a theological understanding of who Christians believe themselves to be as members of communities that attempt to follow Jesus. Understanding such a relationship requires seeing the connection between a community's call to live as forgiven people and the fact that to the extent to which it commits itself to the truth, such a community will necessarily engender conflict. Hauerwas recognizes that the difficult question is how to conjoin in one community those two seemingly irreconcilable practices: on the one hand, that each Christian community is called to be that place where forgiveness is always available; and on the other hand, that each community, in calling its members to accountability to the truth of Jesus Christ, is called to make judgments that often exacerbate conflict. That these two practices appear irreconcilable is itself, Hauerwas suggests, indicative of the problem. Part of the problem stems from the fact that our notion of "peace" is seldom theologically informed; that is, our notion of peace is often indistinguishable from that truncated view of peace as the complete absence of conflict, that "false peace of the world which is too often built more on power than truth" (p. 95). Such a notion hinders us from recognizing that genuine peacemaking cannot be separated from the practice of speaking the truth; however, such truth-speaking is directed not first of all to the world, but to ourselves. Such a posture has the potential to transform the nature of confrontation both within and without the community, for it reminds us that "we confront one another not as forgivers, not as those who use forgiveness as



power, but first and foremost as people who have learned the truth about ourselves--namely, that we are all people who need to be and have been forgiven" (pp. 93-94).

Hauerwas also helpfully illuminates the Christian virtue of hope in his essay (written with Thomas Shaffer) entitled "Hope Faces Power: Thomas More and the King of England." This essay serves as a powerful example of a point that Hauerwas never fails to emphasize: Theological/moral judgments cannot be made in the abstract, but require that a people make discriminations in concrete situations. That such is the case is one reason Hauerwas spends so much energy exploring the relationships between character, virtue and the story of a particular people. But what Hauerwas does in this and several other essays throughout this collection is to display these relationships with an illuminating concreteness that stems from his ability to weave together theological/moral reflection and personal narrative. That is, by telling More's story in a particular way, Hauerwas had greatly enriched our theological/moral imaginations by helping us see how inseparable were More's life and his theological/moral commitments.

These above-mentioned essays are but two examples of how themes which have held a prominent place in Hauerwas's thinking--peacemaking and hope--continue to be fleshed out in this latest collection. What is perhaps most encouraging about this fleshing out is how Hauerwas has gone about doing it. First, I think it is fair to say that in his latest offering Hauerwas has virtually stopped talking about "narrative" as an abstraction and has increasingly moved toward engaging particular narratives, a strategy which has allowed him to exhibit powerfully how it is that these narratives are essential to argument. Similarly, Hauerwas tends to say less these days about "virtue" in the abstract and more about specifically Christian virtues--that is, more about how the story of Jesus and those who follow Him makes a difference to how these virtues are construed by and embodied in particular communities. Equally promising is that both of the above trends have made it possible, indeed necessary, for Hauerwas to engage more directly with Christian Scripture.

It is tempting to offer further specific comments about other essays in the collection, such as how Hauerwas talks about practical reason in ways that might make it possible to rehabilitate casuistry as a legitimate Christian moral practice; how his recurrent theme of moral formation looks when he reflects on the place of "formal" education, and especially so-called "Christian" education; or how his understanding of "character" plays out when it is directed toward the character of those who have a special call to be ministers of the gospel. But I'll resist such notating, which might mislead some people into thinking that they needn't read the book, and concentrate the remainder of my reflections on what is perhaps the most provocative and suggestive theme that runs throughout these essays: the theme of time.

Somewhat ironically, that the issue of time flows as a persistent undercurrent throughout these pages is a tribute to the *positive* influence of Gustafson. In fact, I might go as far as to say that the prominent place which the issue of time holds in Hauerwas's thought is unintelligible apart from Gustafson's reflections on



the relationship of time and community, particularly as Gustafson displays it in several chapters (and in the appendix, which is a summary of Gustafson's dissertation) of *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. In short, Gustafson argues that time is constitutive of community in that the latter is such only insofar as it is a community of language, of interpretation, of memory and understanding, and of belief and action. Each of these constitutive aspects of all human communities (including the Church) are thoroughly infused by temporality; that is, they are penetrated throughout by the dialectical forces of the past, present and future.

That Hauerwas has learned these lessons well hardly requires substantiation. Regular readers of Hauerwas need only be reminded of the prominent place of concepts such as narrative, description, remembering and conviction, to see how thoroughly Hauerwas has internalized the important place of time in any discussion of community. The central issue for any such discussion is that of continuity and/or identity over time. As Gustafson notes, there are usually important analogies between how one understands the self and time and how one understands community. But Hauerwas, perhaps more than most of the philosophers whom Gustafson deals with, attempts to integrate more fully the dialectical relationship between the self and community, both of which are thoroughly immersed in time. One of the ways Hauerwas keeps the dialectic operative is by insisting that community is prior to the self; that is, it is a mistake to start from a construal of the self and then move to an understanding of community. Hence, with regard to the self and its continuity/identity over time, Hauerwas suggests that no such continuity/identity is possible apart from that self's "character" and its ability to situate itself coherently within a narrative (which may amount to the same thing)--both of which are irreducibly communal. Likewise, Hauerwas's concern for the continuity of self and community over time is the reason for his emphasis on virtue, for "the virtues bind our past with our future by providing us with the continuity of self" (p. 265). With regard to the continuity/identity of the Christian community over time, Hauerwas points first of all not to the "character" of the Church, but to the faithful character of God as most fully revealed in the story of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth, and as remembered, embodied and performed by those who have been called to radical discipleship. Hence, all of the categories that have become the hallmark of Hauerwas's work--character, narrative, memory, virtue--all are attempts to make connections between the self's communal nature and the community's irreducibly temporal character.

But it may well be that Hauerwas has pushed the importance of time even further than did Gustafson, or at least in directions which the latter never seriously considered. This is particularly the case with Hauerwas's emphasis on the "eschatological" character of Christian communities, a category about which he remained somewhat oblique in his earlier writings, but about which he is now beginning to demonstrate some lucidity. This emphasis surfaces, for example, in his insistence that salvation involves the "creation of a timeful people" (p. 50 whose existence on behalf of the world creates "a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the Kingdom" (p. 106).

The notion that salvation involves the creation of a timeful people is critica



for Hauerwas for several reasons. First, it avoids the problem with many "classical" theories of the atonement, which, by framing the discussion of salvation by means of the abstract category of "atonement," makes it possible, if not necessary, to speak of salvation apart from the community which such salvation creates. Such theories tend toward gnosticism in that they suggest that salvation involves little more than God's "work" and our knowledge of it. But Hauerwas insists that salvation is not simply a matter of knowledge, of knowing that we are a people who are "saved"; rather, salvation involves being saved "to" something (a new people) which is inseparable from, indeed simply is, salvation itself.

Second, by emphasizing salvation as the creation of an eschatological community, Hauerwas suggests that it may not be possible to know what salvation means apart from such a community; that is, it may be that salvation is so closely tied to what it means to be such an eschatological community--a community whose very life together is an important, albeit an insufficient, expression of the presence of the Kingdom--that one should not, perhaps cannot, frame the issue of salvation apart from participation in such a community. Said in a different way, Hauerwas reminds us that salvation must reach to the very core of what it means to be human, which, without appearing to "essentialize" what we mean by the "human," can be affirmed to be irreducibly temporal; that is, all that we "are" (or hope to be) is inextricably connected with the fact that we belong to communities of language, of interpretation, of memory and understanding, and of belief and action, all of which are thoroughly infused with temporality. So whatever else salvation may be, Hauerwas is right to suggest that God cannot truly "save" us while ignoring the fact that we need to be redeemed from the tyrannies of time that enslave us. We need a "new" time. But any "time" that will really be "new" must necessarily involve the "redemption" of our language, interpretations, memories, beliefs, actions, and the like. (This, I take it, is part of what Hauerwas means to imply by the title of one of his essays: "The Church as God's New Language.") Because this is the case, Hauerwas is right to insist that such a new, eschatological "time" cannot come to us apart from a community that is involved in the very temporally-infused activities noted above. Thus, we cannot be saved from the tyranny of time apart from the creation of a "timeful" people, a people who institute a new, eschatological relationship to time.

Finally, by emphasizing the "timeful" and therefore communal nature of salvation, Hauerwas has perhaps done us the greatest service by "historicizing" that salvation must be in twentieth-century America. It is not enough simply to say that what it means to be human is irreducibly temporal, for *how* humans experience time in a given culture is all important. While I cannot do justice here to the complex structures of time instituted within modern capitalist societies, perhaps it is enough to be reminded of how such societies encourage a calculating and economizing attitude toward time. The fact that we speak of time as something we can spend, save, waste, use and buy is only one indication of how such societies transform time into another, if not the most valuable, commodity. That Christians have been redeemed is another way of saying that they have been brought into a community that embodies the truth that time is ultimately a



gift. A people whose lives are marked by this gratuitousness can "afford" to take time for the trivial, for they have been freed from the tyranny of thinking that their ultimate destiny and happiness is tied to how they "spend" their time. This freedom makes it possible for a "new" time to appear, a time for caring for those who do not promise to make the world a better place, a time for being with those who do not promise to contribute to our status, a time for entering into the gratuitous and joyful worship of a God who does not promise that things will always work out "right."

Of course, to the extent that Christian communities fail to embody such redemption, that is, to the extent that they fail to embody such freedom from the tyranny of economized time, their redemption/sanctification remains seriously incomplete. But to the extent that they engage in practices which challenge this reigning view of time, we may confidently assert that there the kingdom is breaking in, there the eschatological is being realized.

Hauerwas has many more provocative things to say about time, such as its intimate relationship to peace, and its ability to create the "space" necessary to resist the totalitarian powers that would drain our lives of their meaning. But perhaps I have pointed to enough to suggest how potentially integrating such an understanding of time might be. In short, we can thank Hauerwas for helping us to see how we might move away from thinking of the distinction between Church and world primarily in *spatial* categories. By suggesting that much of what is important about this crucial distinction is missed when we fail to construe it in temporal categories--as the distinction between two aeons, as Yoder puts it--Hauerwas has given us much to consider, not the least of which is one more reason to doubt those who accuse him of sectarianism. Such charges, which are usually coupled with accusations of "withdrawal," are so closely bound to spatial metaphors that they fail to account for the temporal dimension. In other words, if the first thing one wants to say about the distinctiveness of the church is not that it inhabits a different "space," but that its life is ordered by a new time, then it becomes difficult to see what sense the charge of "withdrawal" makes. If such a shift in emphasis is one of Hauerwas's goals, then he has made some important headway; however, given such an objective, Hauerwas might have been wise to choose a subtitle that didn't appear to trade on the very spatial metaphors he wishes to minimize. Furthermore, he might consider giving us more help in seeing how the spatial and temporal are connected. One place where he has begun to do this well concerns his understanding of hospitality: because Christians live with a different relationship to time, they have the freedom to welcome the stranger into their "space." We can only hope to see more connections along these lines in the future.

Since it seems unlikely that Hauerwas will quit writing books anytime soon, perhaps it may be worth taking a few moments to suggest, rather presumptuously I suppose, what else we might hope Hauerwas will do in the coming years. As noted above, Hauerwas seems to be at his best when he combines two different elements: closely reasoned argument and narrative depiction. For example Hauerwas is both provocative and stimulating when he takes up a suggestive re



mark by someone like Yoder, spells out the "philosophical" arguments entailed by Yoder's remark in a more deliberate manner than Yoder either needs or cares to do, and interweaves such "abstract" work with a story that provides material for theological imagination. Hauerwas has different ways in which he does this, sometimes using a story to introduce the issues at stake (such as his discussion with a philosopher about school prayer), sometimes using a narrative to frame the whole argument (such as his essay on Thomas More), other times using the stories more as exemplifications of the more abstract arguments he has adduced (such as his use of Olin Teague as an example of practical reasoning within a concrete community). What makes these examples so impressive is not so much that Hauerwas knows how to do both things at once (although he does and many of us probably don't), but that they help us see that both are argument; that is, that these are merely two necessary moments in any discussion that seeks to be illuminative. So, in any future work, we can only hope that Hauerwas continues to make the most of this gift.

As far as enigmas that remain in his work, one general area may be alluded to. In the introduction to this collection, Hauerwas suggests that Christians should withdraw their support from civic republicanism only when that form of government or society resorts to violence to maintain order and external society (p. 15). This is a theme that Hauerwas has sounded before. While readers may find themselves in agreement with Hauerwas in principle, it remains for him to help readers see what resources are available to help "form" people in such a way that making such discriminations is possible. Hauerwas would be the first to admit that making discriminations about what counts for violence is no easy matter (and certainly cannot be made in the abstract), but it seems that it is precisely at this very difficult juncture that we are left on our own. Furthermore, Hauerwas has not yet explored the implications for his understanding of violence and peace once it is recognized that much of the violence which enslaves us and others is what has been called "symbolic violence." What makes such violence so pernicious is that it exerts its power without resorting to physical coercion. What practices and strategies might Christians engage in to create the space possible to live without such violence?

Similarly, Hauerwas may have to help his readers even more in coming to see what kind of community will be necessary for this kind of formation to take place. For example, while some readers will no doubt resonate with Hauerwas's contention that "at times and in some circumstances Christians will find it impossible to participate in government, in aspects of the economy, or in the educational system" (p. 15), others may find the whole notion of "participation" here so vague that their imaginations are stymied when they attempt to consider how they might do otherwise. Admittedly, that many of us may find ourselves incapable of such imaginative forays is perhaps less a function of Hauerwas's shortcomings and more a reflection of our own captivity to particular habits of mind and life, yet such an admission hardly gets Hauerwas off the hook; it simply means that he may have to keep arguing what he's been arguing for a long time before anyone can really hear what he's saying, or more importantly perhaps, be-

fore anyone will know what to do or be if they discern that what he's been saying is true.

Now, Hauerwas both would and would not want us to take all of this (or ourselves) so seriously. After all, reading books, writing reviews, conversing with our friends, sharing a meal, jogging at noon--these are perhaps trivial matters, and yet they are of tremendous ethical importance, particularly to the extent that they create the time (and peace) necessary for us to live as a redeemed people, which may entail nothing less than having the freedom to go on joyfully doing things like the above even when it seems like we should be directing all our energies to more urgent matters. Of course, bringing all of this to your attention probably only serves as a reminder; after all, I would expect that readers who have endured this article are no doubt already consummate connoisseurs of the trivial.



# Book Reviews

## Book Review Essay

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Cooper, David C. *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989. 304 pp. Hardback. ISBN 0-8203-1094-8

Some people's lives seem to defy limitation and definition. They appear on the human scene almost magically, mysteriously, and shape whatever they touch for generations to come. They become the stuff of heady legends and form a kind of happy hunting ground for scholars. Their graves are never cold and silent. History is warmed when such people are benefactors, and chilled when they are tyrants.

Thomas Merton was one of these unique people. He was a Trappist monk--and a benefactor. Although a member of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.), one of Roman Catholicism's strictest orders, he became in his lifetime the most widely read monk in the world. That in itself is a contradiction and at the heart of Cooper's concern. How is it that a man who desires to lose himself in the cloistered life of Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery, tucked away in the central Kentucky knobs and hills, becomes instead an avowed Christian humanist, addressing himself to issues of modern life in the fast lane? Or, to put it in Merton's terms, what motivates a man to move in less than twenty years from life in a "cowl" to life in "blue jeans," and that while continuing to profess allegiance to the values of contemplative spirituality? It is Cooper's aim to answer these kinds of questions.

David Cooper has more than a passing interest in Thomas Merton. Currently an assistant professor in the Department of American Thought and Language at Michigan State University, Cooper is increasingly known as a Merton scholar. In addition to this insightful and helpful book on the development of Merton's understanding of self-identity, Cooper is editing the fourth volume in *The Letters of Thomas Merton* series. (The first two volumes have been released under the titles of *The Hidden Ground of Love* and *The Road to Joy*.)

*Thomas Merton's Art of Denial* is not for those who are reading Merton (Father Louis, as he was known in the monastery) for the first time. The book as-

sumes some knowledge of Merton's life and writing interests. It is for those, like myself and Cooper, who have been hooked by Merton and want to know as much as possible how the man ticked. There is, I think, an unconscious--if not conscious--hope that we will learn something about ourselves in studying the spiritual and emotional development of Merton.

Cooper is not the first writer to pursue this line of investigation into Merton's psyche. Several books and monographs have already attempted to shed light on the hidden stream of ideas and experiences that shifted Merton from a world-rejecting monk with an identity crisis to a world-accepting monk with something of a unified vision of humanity. The mystery is heightened somewhat by the fact that all of this change of attitude and perspective happened while Merton was in the monastery, and did not change his fundamental commitment to monastic spirituality as one way to God.

Cooper's area of research is a difficult one. The broad outline of Merton's growth as a human "self" is rather easy to chart, as we will do below. But getting to the details of Merton's inner life is a bit more problematic for a couple of reasons. First, there is the sheer volume of printed material available, and the wide scope of subjects it handles. How Merton was able to produce so much in so short a time is simply a marvel. This becomes even more amazing when we take into account that for a very long time Merton was allowed only two, at most three, hours a day for writing. Of course, not everything he wrote was of excellent quality, as Merton woefully acknowledged.

A second problem facing researchers is that the bulk of Merton's unpublished writings are off limits, at least for the time being. Merton stipulated that certain of his writings not be published until twenty-five years after his death. This means, since he died in December, 1968, that these materials will not be released until around 1993-94. Notwithstanding, the Merton Legacy Trust, guardian of the larger part of the Merton collection, has allowed some publication along the way. Still there is a sizeable amount of material to be sifted through. It is not unlikely that some new twists and turns may be in the offing. Whether such discoveries will be substantial for Cooper's line of thought is another matter. Nevertheless, the final word is in the future.

The life of Thomas Merton was anything but dull. A lot of good evenings could be spent with Merton's autobiography and journals, or with any one of several good biographies that are available. The life that unfolds in these books is international in scope, full of insights on human problems and the search for God, and laced with humor. If it is true that St. Francis of Assisi loved those monks who laughed out loud at prayer, he would have loved Thomas Merton! But there was a period when life was more pain than fun for Merton.

It was as a creative and confused young man that Thomas Merton entered Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery on a winter night in 1941. Trying to escape his past and the society that seemed only to increase his loneliness, Merton plunged full force into the apophatic spirituality of the Trappists, a cloistered order emphasizing stark simplicity, border-line poverty, total obedience, sacrificial chastity, hard work--and silence in solitude. It seemed the perfect place to bury



one's self, to die to everything but Christ. At 26, Merton thought he was ready to sacrifice everything meaningful to him, literally everything, to attain one supreme end: sainthood. What frightened Merton and his friends most is that this seemed to bring an abrupt halt to a promising writing career. But Merton's first abbot, Frederic Dunne, himself a man of letters, realized the potential of his new novice and began to feed Merton's ravenous writing urge. This brought to the forefront a terrible tension in Merton. On the one hand, he wanted to be an obscure monk, known only to God. On the other hand, he wanted to be a popular and respected writer. It is this tension that Cooper thinks Merton resolved in the "missing years."

Between 1948 (with the publication of his best seller, *The Seven Storey Mountain*) and 1957, something drastic happened to Merton that changed him totally. Merton moved from being a rigid, judgmental, Trappist monk concerned primarily with meditation and the single-minded pursuit of contemplation to more of a free spirit, with a cautious but hopeful view of possibilities for the world, and an intense desire to be directly involved in the upheavals of social life worldwide. Merton had begun his monastic journey in a very traditional way but surfaced later as a leader of monastic renewal—to say the least!

Cooper, using selective aspects of Erik Erikson's perspective on identity formation, sees the shift in these terms. In his early twenties, Merton's life was marked by identity diffusion. This confusion of self-identity can be seen in Merton's book, *My Argument with the Gestapo*, written while he was a university student but not published until 1969. This identity diffusion revolved around the tension created by the desire to display the self and the desire to die to the self. It was this man who knocked on the monastery door in the dead of night.

Merton was well into his sixth year as a monk when his best-selling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was released. He was virtually an overnight success. The walls around the monastic enclosure could not keep out public interest and the demand for more books. Sudden fame, coupled with Merton's preparation for ordination, compounded the tension within him and sent him into a state of nervous exhaustion. *Seven Storey Mountain* showed the world a man driven into a radical psychological realignment, according to Cooper; that is, an attempted realignment of his sense of self along strict monastic lines. The young author was a man fed up with the world and with himself.

By the time Merton published his sequel to *Mountain* in 1953, *The Sign of Jonas*, Cooper thinks he had moved into a kind of psychosocial moratorium. *The Sign of Jonas* portrays a monk intent on developing an individual piety. Later, in *4 Thomas Merton Reader*, Merton would say that books from his early period seemed to be the ones most preferred by readers. Books like *Mountain*, *Jonas*, and *Seeds of Contemplation* (1947) challenged Americans in a booming post-war economy to rethink the impact a growing materialism was having on them. As a result many young men decided to opt for the romance of the monastic life and its inherent denial of worldly values and illusions. Cooper points out that in the years previous to *Jonas*, Merton's poetic output dwindled to almost nothing. This was the sign of a real inner struggle in a man who was by nature a poet. Deny



who you are: this seemed to be the call of Christ. After all those years Thomas Merton had still not resolved the problem--to him--between being a writer, a man of the world, and a monk, a man of the Spirit.

By 1966, with the publication of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, a new Merton was solidly in place. The turn was noticeable as early as 1957 when Merton's poetic creativity returned with a vengeance. By the late fifties, Merton had become critical of the image he portrayed in *Mountain*. It was to him a limited, truncated, even false view of an ideal monk, too ideal to ever be realized. His early monastic identity was seen as a selfish aberration of the real person God intended him to become. Love had to be turned outward--toward others. A Christian could not be satisfied to be a bystander in the turmoil of the world. "The missing years" were dedicated to half a life; the half that was missing was the life of the social order. Following Erikson, Cooper thinks with the publication of *Conjectures* Merton had reached final identity integration. Merton had become a whole man, so to speak. Merton did not jettison the spirituality of his early monastic years, rather he refined it, enlarged it, and set it in a social and international context.

What factors led to such a significant change, a change some viewed with horror, others with relish? Cooper thinks a cluster of influences were involved, some internal to Merton and some external. Cooper explores this identity change in two parts of his book, each having four chapters. The first, "The Crisis of the Missing Years," highlights Merton's troubled period of the late forties and early fifties, and focuses on some of the internal influences exacted on him. During this period Merton experienced a continuing tension regarding what he was called to become. He also had a deep distrust of the world, reflected in his judgmental pronouncements on its values. He seemed to have had a deep need for acceptance, especially from a father-figure. These years also show a growing dissatisfaction with a highly regimented Cistercian spirituality, which he regarded as increasingly restrictive of real spiritual growth. Finally Merton exhibited an almost overpowering self-doubt that he could ever become a real monk. "The missing years" cast a kind of pall over Merton, although he did have times of great joy and a sense of meaning. Clearly though, something would have to change.

There were also external influences, which we see in Cooper's second part of the book, "A Radical Humanist and the Radical Critique." Becoming a "radical humanist" was Merton's response to his "failed mysticism," according to Cooper. The radical humanist is less afraid of the world, though he must at times expose its illusions. There is no doubt that this was a period of social concern for Merton. He was consumed with issues of war and peace. Some of Merton's most pungent remarks were reserved for the war-like mentality he saw operating in the world and in the Church. Merton also wrote on matters of race and prejudice, of Catholic indifference (as he saw it) to the responsibility to love one's enemies.

Cooper highlights Merton's interest in the then-new generation of Protestant theologians. For example, there was Karl Barth with his strong Christology, and



Dietrich Bonhoeffer with his "worldly Christianity," a notion that sent shock waves through the evangelical Church. Merton drew the line with the God-is-dead theologians, viewing them as dead wrong, an idea shored up for him by the Orthodox writer, Alexander Schmemmann. Merton's appreciation of Protestant writers was augmented by a relaxed mood toward other Christians by Vatican II, a move Merton applauded.

There was also Merton's interest in non-Christian writers, especially Albert Camus, on whose work he wrote some critical essays. Merton considered Camus the most relevant of the secular writers, though he did not share Camus's pessimism and "acting as if" ethic. Merton was impressed by Eric Fromm and his insights into the human condition. Along these same lines, though not given their due weight by Cooper, was Merton's revived interest in Zen, especially as providing a helpful psychology as well as technique for Christian meditation. (This point is of significance in my overall evaluation of Cooper's book below.)

Given Merton's genius and restlessness, it was a foregone conclusion that he could never remain fulfilled by a particular system or institution, no matter how meaningful in the early going. Merton seemed to always be pushing boundaries, even when he said he did not want to do so. His protests against his instincts as a writer were in vain. There is no question that Merton entered the monastery to become a monk. And there is no question that he changed that to an identification as a writer--and a monk. Merton later referred to himself as a "Christian humanist." And this is an important point: the new Merton was more than a "radical humanist," he was a "Christian humanist."

Cooper's finely written and exceedingly helpful book is a major contribution to the field of Merton studies. From one perspective, this study of Thomas Merton is also the study of Christianity in the twentieth century. In fact, Merton himself was a change-agent in many ways, and continues to be. Merton regarded the books he wrote in the late fifties and sixties to be of most value to him, as would be expected. However, I suspect his works on meditation and prayer will be of significant benefit to many generations of Christians, for it really was Merton's interior life, combined with his inquisitiveness, that sparked the identity changes we see in his relatively short life. There is a bit of irony that Merton, the prominent Catholic spiritual writer and activist (as much as he could be), and Karl Barth, the prominent Protestant theologian, whom Merton liked, died the same day. It was a changing of the guard for Western Christendom.

Cooper has designed an effective book which is easy to read and gives evidence of deliberate scholarship. The endnotes for each chapter are a bit sparse, even the weighty nature of the subject. The same is true for the general subject index. Although choices have to be made on endnotes and index content, Cooper's work is so important that many would like more identification of sources and prominent ideas than Cooper supplies.

Books are written for everyone except editors and reviewers. The rub comes that these are among the first to read them. Happy the writer who has connoisseurial editors and sympathetic reviewers. That writer will have a long, happy life



and many children--or something like that. This reviewer found Cooper's book a delight. There are, however, some gaps.

For example, Cooper is one-sided in his treatment of Merton by viewing the development of his self-identity almost exclusively through psychosocial lenses. There is no question, of course, that Merton's home life, adolescence and young adulthood, fears, struggles with death, and so on, had a profound effect on him throughout his life. Psychological and social elements impacting his development should not be ignored. However, neither should we ignore God's love and call acting on him. Actually it is impossible to talk meaningfully about the development of the self, or self-identity, without a Divine/human relationship, that is, if one wishes to speak from a Christian posture.

I am sure it seems easier to chart the development of the psyche according to, say, Erikson's psychosocial model or Kohlberg's moral development model. But surely God is one of those internal/external influences or change-agents in Merton's life; Merton would say, the most important. But Cooper seems more at home with Erikson, who does indeed have wide acceptance. Nonetheless, I do not think Erikson's model carries the weight Cooper intends. It seems that James Fowler's faith development model, relatively close to Erikson, is better suited for an interpretation of Merton's changing view of the self (cf. *Stages of Faith*).

Utilizing Fowler's model, beginning with "synthetic-conventional faith," a stage usually entered in adolescence but retained in "most" Christian adults, we are able to see how Merton begins his monastic career with the desire to attain a great fidelity by conforming to the expectations of others. The monastic community at Gethsemani, steeped in tradition in 1941, would have reinforced the supposed security of this stage of spiritual development; indeed, the pre-Vatican II understanding of "the Church" tended to do the same thing. The self, then, is a rather conventional self, requiring little or no critique of the system from which it draws its identity. This certainly seems to be the mind-set of the Merton of the early forties.

It is safe to say that Merton was moving back and forth between "synthetic-conventional faith" and Fowler's next stage, "individuative-reflective faith." Merton gradually accepted, albeit uneasily, the responsibilities of his actions in moving into a monastic vocation. He accepted, for the most part, the deeper meaning implied by his decision to seek God in the closed environment of Gethsemani. Certainly Merton's creative and curious mind caused him to go behind the symbols of life and faith, and that rather early. He was rarely, if ever, comfortable with the surface level of things, even in nature. He preferred essence to appearance. If, as Fowler suggests, entrance into this stage is usually triggered by an inner restlessness, a disturbing sense of reality, then there were many occasions in Merton's novice period to push him beyond systems and rules.

"Conjunctive faith," Fowler's next stage, is very high indeed. At this stage persons are willing, even eager, to dialogue with other faith-systems, to look for truth wherever it is found. By 1957, Merton was exploring other understandings of reality as fast as he could. He saw a need to integrate conscious and subcon-



scious forces in his life, partially in a new view of others "as others," as "thous" rather than "its" (to borrow from Buber, whom Merton respected). The motivating concerns of this stage, according to Fowler, are reflected in the need to see life in relation to universal love and justice. This, in part, could account for Merton's radical investment of energy in social matters as he approached mid life.

The last stage for Fowler is "universalizing faith." This is seeing life as the big picture, from the standpoint of a person absorbed with love and justice. The private self is given over to the concerns of the larger whole. This is "golden rule" living and "loving God with all you are and your neighbor as yourself," and that with little or no hesitation or defensiveness. This is the counterpoint to a judgmental spirit, operating as it does from empathy for others. Everything we know about the mature Merton points to this universalizing faith as the major characteristic of his life in the mid sixties. This stage is not a static perfectionism, but a genuine living out of self-giving. It is marked by a certain unseen joy. It is, as Merton would say, a gift of the Spirit.

I think Fowler integrates the best of Erikson with his own system. I really do not want to contend for a system as such, but I would hope that whatever system or theory we use to understand Merton's search for self-identity would incorporate both the psychosocial and the spiritual. Benedict Groschel and Gerald May, recognized authorities in the field of self-identity and spirituality, have also tried to do this. Of course, God is not bound by any system, as we see so clearly in the "fools for Christ" of the Orthodox tradition.

My concerns above relate to another, similar matter. The "radical" character of Merton's "humanism" was that it was radically Christian. He called himself a Christian humanist. This is to say that Merton would not have become a secular humanist. His Christology would not have permitted this. Cooper does say Merton's humanism was essentially Christian, but does not, in my opinion, say it loudly enough. Based on his views on war and peace, his taped conferences of the mid sixties, and his declining interest in speaking forcefully on social issues, Merton was constitutionally unable to have ever become a gun-toting "Christian" revolutionary in the third world. The radical nature of the self, as Merton saw it, lies in its relationship with the radical love of Christ, a love that gives, absorbs, blesses, forgives and dies.

In one place Cooper unaccountably errs. It is with Merton's growing interest in Zen. I think a case can be made that the Merton of the mid to late sixties was returning to a renewed interest in meditation and prayer, and that this pursuit was largely sparked by his fascination with Zen Buddhism. This has been a ticklish point for some people, even to the extent of thinking Merton was in the process, before he died, of leaving Gethsemani to become a Buddhist monk. It is difficult to put that unfounded rumor to rest, but it should be. Merton thought Zen had important psychological contributions to make to the Christian understanding of the self and its relationship with God through meditation. The "Buddha nature," for Merton, was in many ways akin to the Christian notion of self-denial, though it was lacking an essential Christology. And if one wants to talk

about integration in Merton's view of the self, how can his experience at Polonaruwa be bypassed?

I am presently convinced that had Merton lived he would have written some of his best work on meditation and prayer. It is unfortunate that we will never know. My point is that Merton's eastern trip helped prepare him to take his readers into different chambers of the Divine mind. Upon reflection, perhaps it is best we do not have these insights. Perhaps it is to our advantage that Merton left us with only a rather full outline of the spiritual journey, leaving it to us to take it and make our own discoveries of God and self.

There are yet other paths in *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial* I would like to explore. I wish Merton's spiritual sources had been able to rear their heads more often; such as the desert fathers, John Cassian, Bernard of Clairvaux, to name a few. I think *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, Merton's last book before his death, deserves a place in Cooper's concern with the development of self-identity. I would liked to have compared Anne E. Carr's book, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit*, with *Art of Denial*. Carr's book may well be the better balanced of the two on Merton's view of the self.

Having said all that, I want to close with a restatement of my earlier appreciation of Cooper's work. In this book he has certainly established himself as a scholar who must be reckoned with whenever serious study is given to Thomas Merton. In the final analysis, a good book is one that energizes people to discuss things that really matter, and Cooper's book does that.



James R. Goff, Jr. *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*. Fayetteville, London: University of Arkansas Press, 1988. ix, 262 pps. ISBN 1-55728-025-8.

The history of Pentecostalism has been the subject of numerous analyses. However, while there has been considerable debate about the origins of the Pentecostal Movement, most have been as much determined by the concerns of the individual author as by the facts. Assemblies of God scholars (Menzies, Blumhofer) have endeavored to minimize the relationships between early leaders and theologians of Pentecostalism and the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Scholars from the Pentecostal Holiness (Synan) and Church of God (Cleveland) (Conn) churches have tended to simplify a complex set of structures. Secular historians (Anderson), have noticed the relationship but have not reflected on its significance. Others (D. Nelson, I. McRoberts), following Walter Hollenweger, have attempted to deny the historical and theological relationships between the two religious traditions locating the origins of Pentecostal theology, liturgy and social vision in "slave religion." The careful historical analysis of Goff, the first non-ideological historical analysis of the origins of Pentecostalism, provides a definitive refutation of the Hollenweger theory and carefully nuances all other earlier historical constructions.

The material for this work is the life and context of Charles Parham (1873-1929), the Wesleyan/Holiness evangelist/theologian who worked out the theoretical structures for the early Pentecostal movement and developed its early organizational patterns. Goff traces the life of Parham from the early days in Kansas where he served as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, before becoming involved with the Holiness movement after an experience of physical healing. He withdrew from the Methodist Church and began a healing ministry. This was moved to Topeka as the Beth-el Healing Home. This eventually expanded to include a Bible Institute, a temporary orphanage service and an employment office. A periodical, *The Apostolic Faith* (which would become an international standard name for Pentecostal periodicals), advertised the meetings and served to link the expanding groups of "Apostolic Faith" believers. Parham continued to be influenced by the writings of A. J. Gordon and Charles Cullis. However, most important for his development were Alexander Dowie and Frank Sanford. He visited their centers to observe and to attempt to inject himself into the leadership of their centers with the undisguised intention of taking control. From 1902-1906 Parham established the "Apostolic Faith" throughout the South, moving his headquarters to Houston. He made provision for William Seymour to go to California as evangelist, where he was invited to pastor the small mission at which American religious history would soon be changed. Parham eventually went to California in an effort to establish "Apostolic Faith" control over the mission. Under attack in the Midwest by his competitor at Zion, Illinois, W. G. Voliva, who charged him with homosexuality, Parham was unable to establish himself in Los Angeles and was expelled from the Azusa Street mission. Goff examines all the evidence and interviewed acquaintances of Parham and

concludes that the information available is insufficient either to implicate or exonerate Parham of the charges.

The Pentecostal movement expanded rapidly, but Parham was unable to retain his position in the leadership of the larger movement after the struggle with Voliva. The organization he founded continued to survive, albeit in the shadow of the larger churches organized after 1906. He moved his headquarters to Baxter Springs, Arkansas, from where he continued his evangelistic ministry in comparative obscurity.

Goff documents each development and controversy with careful detail. He chronicles the theological and ecclesiological developments in Parham's thought throughout the transition from Wesleyan/Holiness to Pentecostal theologian. One is struck by the fact that all of the theoretical structures for the appearance of what would be considered a "distinctly Pentecostal" perspective were in place several years before Azusa Street. Even more apparent from Goff's narrative is the nationwide network of evangelist/theologians and institutions which were moving together toward a consensus for which Parham was a foremost theoretician. It was he who concluded that "glossolalia" was *the* initial evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, that "Spirit-filled believers [are] the 'sealed' Bride of Christ," and that "xenoglossic tongues [were] the tool for a dramatic endtime revival" (p. 173). Each of these ideas had had its adherents in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition for more than a decade. Parham's contribution was to fuse the three.

Goff has assembled and analyzed with magisterial care all known data about Charles Parham, including never-before-used periodical literature produced by the Holiness and Pentecostal movements between 1890 and 1929. There are unanswered questions. The information about the scandals which caused Parham's downfall is incomplete and does not provide an adequate base for arriving at conclusions. It is also impossible to describe with bibliographic precision the various influences on Parham's thought. Additional research in Wesleyan/Holiness periodical literature will be necessary before the milieu of Parham's thinking can be established and the various trajectories of Wesleyan/Holiness thought described. Additional scholarly analyses are needed for other key players of the period including the racist W. Faye Carothers, Black evangelist William Seymour and Dowie follower W. G. Voliva. Similar studies are necessary for theologians in competition with the early Pentecostals, such as P. Breese, H. C. Morrison, William Sherman, A. B. Simpson and Seth Rees who did not join the new movement. These are all dissertation topics in their own right, so to suggest that they are important desiderata is not to take away from Goff's achievement. He has provided a benchmark against which other efforts will be judged.

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William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1987. xii, 227 pp. ISBN 0226363090

Christian mission has been a constant factor of the American experience. The New England Puritans came to understand their mission, their "errand to the wilderness," as creating a new order of protective and nurturing environment for the Church through the reorganization of the North American continent as was their Christian duty. Their hope was to provide a model for the spirituality of the European nations. Through the various periods of American history, the concept of mission and the target audiences have changed. Enthusiasm for the project, variously defined, has remained high. Despite the thousands of persons who "went" and the millions who supported the undertaking financially, little effort has been made to examine American mission thought using scholarly tools of analysis. Hutchison's is a pioneering effort.

The method of the volume is to focus on the interaction between the mission theory, the structure of the ideas and the main themes of American cultural development. These themes include the varying degrees of national isolationism and internationalism, the "Christ and culture" balance in the United States, the development of American national identity and the developing awareness and concept of the larger world. Special attention is given to the problem of defining the goal of Christian mission: Is the mission to civilize (that is promote American standards of social interaction, health, economics, and so on) or is it to "evangelize"?

Hutchison begins with the Puritans and Roman Catholic missions to the Native Americans. The mission efforts coincided with the development of European colonial structures and their success was usually directly related to the cooperation of colonial rulers. Others, such as Roger Williams and the Quakers, attempted to see the "image of God" in the Native Americans and found them generally to be less "sinful" than the Europeans! Eschatological analysis provided a rationalization for the lack of success: the conversion of the nations was not expected before the fall of the "Antichrist." It was Cotton Mather who provided the ideological basis for subsequent efforts. He asserted that America was new land where "true and original Christianity" was developing.

The early national period saw small beginnings enveloped with expansive triumphalistic rhetoric as mission organizations used biblical, humanitarian and nationalist rationales to encourage contributions. The American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission (ABCFM) was founded in 1810 and remained the premier sending agency for more than half a century. It was centered in New England and drew deeply from the Puritan ethos. The same was true of most of the other numerically significant agencies including the Northern Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists. Strategists of the period include Samuel Worcester, Samuel Hopkins, E. D. Griffin and Hiram Bingham. The most important, however, was Rufus Anderson (ABCFM), "the outstanding American organizer and theorist of foreign missions in the nineteenth century" (p. 78). Anderson insisted



that Christian religion and civilization will triumph and that cultural structures are not to be imposed since the Holy Spirit uses the exposition of the gospel to develop a thoroughly Christian civilization. He insisted that education and evangelism be done in the vernacular and that all non-evangelistic structures that had become part of the ABCFM program be discontinued. He was able to promote this understanding during more than forty years as secretary of the ABCFM.

The reaction to Anderson was strong. The new language of mission, paralleling the American national experience, became one of imperialism, as expressed in Robert Speer's comment: "There is a false imperialism which is abhorrent to Christianity, and there is a true imperialism which is inherent in it." Evangelism became a more inclusive term, incorporating all of the social programs Anderson had attempted to suppress. The new leaders were John R. Mott, Sherwood Eddy, Robert E. Speer, James Dennis and A. T. Pierson. In a context marked by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and the 1893 Congress on World Religions, both the liberals and evangelicals shared a common vision of the superiority of Christianity and a commitment to social ministry.

The central theme of mission theory for the twentieth century has been the dialectic first articulated by Anderson which each successive organization and missiologist has since been forced to address: evangelism vs. social ministry. Hutchison documents the shifts in both "liberal" and "evangelical" circles, examining especially Gustav Warneck, Heinrich Frick, W. H. Griffith Thomas, Robert Speer, W. E. Hocking, D. J. Fleming, R. C. Hutchison, Pearl Buck, J. G. Machen, D. McGavran, H. Kraemer, J. Hoekendijk, J. R. Stott and L. Newbigin. As the discussion has continued, and as groups of "evangelicals" have legitimized social ministry, albeit on a different ideological basis than the "liberals," new independent organizations have grown up on the "right" to provide significant personal and financial resources for "evangelistic missions."

Hutchison's analysis of the development of mission theory is a magisterial effort that will serve as a necessary starting point for future work. He makes no effort to oversimplify complex data, motivations and relationships. He fairly states positions from all sides of the various ideological divides. He also indicates an awareness of material not included in the analysis, especially Wesleyan/Holiness and Pentecostal mission efforts of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The author makes no pretension of exhaustive analysis, and so to suggest areas which, if considered, might have resulted in a different portrait is not to detract from the significance of Hutchison's work. The greatest problem of the book is its focus on the "mainline" theorists. "Non-mainline" influences are interpreted only in light of the "mainline" or as reactions to that structure before 1960. The class or social location issue, which is of major import for the study of American missions, does not enter the discussion. For example, the friction between the Methodist Mission Board and the Holiness advocates who supplied many of the Methodist missionaries between 1870 and 1920 can be best understood in such terms. The key theorists for this period are William Taylor and Andrew Murray. Taylor, in turn, influenced Vivian Dake, William Sherman



Anna Abrams and Hiram Reynolds. E. Stanley Jones and J. Wascom Pickett contributed to a redefinition of mission practice which paved the way for post-Colonial Christianity in Asia. Europeans such as Karl Hoekendijk, T. B. Barratt, A. P. Franklin and Fred Squire provided the missiological theory which has made Pentecostalism the third largest Christian communion.

The interaction between Americans and Europeans between 1870 and 1900, especially the "higher life" Holiness Americans (W. Boardman, R. P. and H. W. Smith, D. L. Moody) and the conservative wing of the Evangelical Alliance (Het Reveil, Le Reveil, Basel Mission), deserves attention as a major mission program directed at the European continent with motives and theoretical structures not unlike those of the early Puritans. The particular convergence of American Wesleyan/Holiness ideology with Anglican Broad Church and Continental Pietism has been underrated in its influence on the mission theory of the twentieth century.

Another issue which merits research is the genre in which missiological reflection is presented. All of the theoreticians discussed by Hutchison spoke and wrote in genre and intellectual categories with which the academic world is comfortable. A more inclusive approach would require the analysis of missionary hagiography/history, testimonies, sermons and periodical literature as well as different sending and funding patterns.

These and other *lacunae* indicate that the history of Christian mission theory is a discipline still in its earliest stages. Hutchison has made a monumental contribution to the field, supplementing the work of Ralph Gabriel, Perry Miller and Sidney Ahlstrom.

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Kung, Hans. *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*.  
New York: Doubleday, 1988. 284 pp. Index. ISBN 0385244983

For those scholars who have tried repeatedly to understand the arcane world of postmodern criticism, Kung's most recent work, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, is something of a boon. This German theologian's style--unlike some of his compatriots--is remarkably lucid, and his basic argument is both orderly and well developed. In a real sense, the work breathes the atmosphere of a mature theologian who has scaled the heights of the contemporary theological world, who can see both its problems and its possibilities, and who is in earnest to communicate this wider perspective.

Ostensibly, the aim of the book is to help religion perform an up-to-date critical and liberating role for both the individual and society. This task, as important

as it is, cannot be accomplished, argues Kung, until "theology has resolved the classical conflicts that have been backed up since the Reformation" (p. 11). In other words, there must be dialogue, understanding and tolerance within the Christian household before the wider, global, perspective of the world religions can be seriously entertained.

But it is precisely this area of classical conflicts in terms of inter-faith dialogue that will, no doubt, prove to be troublesome for both Catholic and Protestant readers alike. Kung's resolution of the theological conflicts of the Reformation era, for example, is much too facile. Erasmus--Kung's choice for a mediator between authoritarian Rome and the aggressive Luther--is idealized in a way that bears little relation to the historical record. Along these lines, the author repeatedly plays a game of "what if." What might have happened if Erasmus had come forward with clear suggestions for practical solutions, and so on (p. 38). But the point is that Erasmus didn't, and what's more, he wouldn't have been Erasmus if he had. Spinning out a wish list, as Kung does, neither alters the historical record, nor does it really prepare the way for future dialogue.

The author is much more effective, however--and some would say more realistic--when he underscores the misery of contemporary dogmatic theology in general (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) and when he calls for the corrective of historical critical exegesis (p. 85) as the only sound basis for theology in the future. Theology, according to Kung, must become as historically attentive as the field of biblical studies already is. Undoubtedly, such an approach will hardly be appreciated by either traditionalists or neo-scholastics, but it could, if employed properly, clear away some of the more perplexing issues that have heretofore divided the churches, especially in terms of the doctrine of the sacraments and church polity.

Beyond classical conflicts, the major argument of the book is concerned with the development of future perspectives. Indeed, for this Tübingen scholar, the heart of the theological endeavor in these postmodern times is the balancing of the norm of Christian theology, that is, revelation, with the horizon of Christian theology which is none other than our own human world of experience--a world that has become remarkably diverse and complex as of late. Aided by the seminal work of Kuhn and Toulmin, Kung maintains that the paradigm of modernity no longer works very well, theologically or otherwise, since it has been successfully criticized in a number of ways. First of all, science, technology and industrialism have all become profoundly questionable for postmoderns, and the watchwords of the Enlightenment such as reason, nature and progress no longer function in the same easy and assuring way. Kung is quick to add however--lest he be seen as giving support to reactionaries--that the postmodern critique on the Enlightenment does not constitute its rejection, but instead its critical acceptance, what the Catholic scholar in one place refers to as "an Enlightenment that is enlightened" (p. 199).

Second, the social, cultural, political and religious myopia of the West has increasingly been called into question by a third world that demands to be heard. Polycentrism, therefore, must replace Western hegemony, and the areas of eco-



conomic exploitation, racism and sexism offer, in the words of Kung, "the central challenge in our century for theology, the Church and society" (p. 175). This means, of course, that the context in which theology needs to be done has grown considerably. In light of this, what the author advocates is a "critical ecumenical theology," a phrase that in a real sense summarizes the entire argument of the book. Theology must become critical in that it should be historically rather than traditionally based, and it must become ecumenical in that it should operate against the widest possible backdrop.

The problems that ensue as one attempts this latter project--that is, constructing Christian theology in light of the other major religions of the world--dominates the remainder of the argument. Yes, the Tübingen scholar does raise and answer the question, "Is there one true religion?"--an answer that, by the way, will not make conservatives very happy--but the major contribution of this section lies elsewhere. Interestingly enough, Kung has developed an objective basis to judge the truth of any given religion with respect to three principal criteria: ethical, religious and Christian. If, for example, a religion spreads inhumanity by hindering the development of human beings or by violating their basic rights, then according to the general ethical criterion just listed, one has a basis for calling this religion both false and bad. Religious practices, in other words, do not have to be tolerated simply because they are religious, and this reviewer, at least, has little doubt as to how Kung would decide the recent Salman Rushdie affair.

In sum, the style of *Theology for the Third Millennium*, its eminent readability, the flow of its argument, and the seriousness and importance of the subject under review all suggest a serious and thoughtful reading by both scholar and layperson. Clearly, Kung has written what should prove to be an appropriate guide to the future of the Church as it addresses some of its very real problems, and as it prepares to speak a relevant word to the people of the twenty-first century.

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Richard Fox. *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, 344 pp., \$10.95, ISBN 0-06-250343-X.

I have rarely been so captivated and, indeed, moved by a biography as I was by this one. I found myself being carried along by the greatness of a man who was portrayed in a masterfully written text, and I knew that I was looking at both Niebuhr as well as twentieth-century politics, culture and theology through new perspectives and insights. The perplexities of human relationships, of political affiliations and of theological categories were dealt with from all sides, as it were, and the book was a veritable kaleidoscope of those complexities.

Nevertheless, constantly standing out from the pages was Niebuhr himself as both a man of his time and one who shaped his time. He was portrayed as a public man, antagonist, friend, colleague, preacher, teacher and devoted son, brother, husband and father. In reading this book one understands Niebuhr's spiritual faith and commitment, and also his political realism. The reader also relates Niebuhr, perhaps for the first time in a comprehensive way, to his family background and to his own family loyalties, and to a life which was lived at a frantic pace. Indeed, one gets out of breath as he or she observes Niebuhr meaningfully participating in his often turbulent life--studying, writing, lecturing, preaching, travelling. And the pictures in the book well illuminate the life of this public man.

There was grandeur in the life which Niebuhr lived, and that comes across through Fox's excellently-crafted work. There was greatness in the compelling figure of Niebuhr, and this also is revealed through the narrative. This biography is a worthy contribution not only to our understanding of a commanding personality, but also to our insight into the history of the century which we share with Niebuhr--theological, political, economic and cultural history.

Most intriguing to me was the full picture of Niebuhr: his sense of humor, his delight in a good argument, his foibles and curious mannerisms. My appreciation for Niebuhr was augmented as the author portrayed Niebuhr's own unashamed sense of morality. Fox revealed that Niebuhr's disagreements with Tillich were not merely intellectual, but personal as well. He could not forgive Tillich's sexual escapades. Likewise, his doubts about John F. Kennedy were not only about Kennedy's politics or lack of intellectual depth. They were also about Kennedy's personal morality--or lack of it. "For all Niebuhr's realism," Fox writes, "he was still the residual 'Protestant purist,' as he confessed to Frankfurter, who could not tolerate a purely amoral public arena. He of course could not endure pure Protestant moralism either. As usual he was in-between, insisting on the 'moral ambiguity' of politics" (p. 272).

One of Fox's best contributions to the study of Niebuhr is this--in order to give us a complete picture of Niebuhr, Fox does an excellent job of weaving Niebuhr's major works throughout the biography by introducing them into the proper chronological context. The author also gives an exposition of these works, and so the reader sees the background of Niebuhr's writings, and Fox's explanations help to illuminate them. Criticisms of Niebuhr's thinking are important, and are not to be overlooked by the admiration one has for this book. However, prior to such evaluations must come a comprehension both of Niebuhr and the context for his thinking and writing. Fox does that for us, and does it with consummate skill.

This book, finally, is a tribute to two people--Niebuhr and Fox. A great service has been rendered to the theological and intellectual history of the twentieth century, and to a lasting understanding of Niebuhr. Fox summarizes the essence of this biography with the final sentence in the Afterward:



Responsibility, long-term commitment, fidelity to family, devotion to the interests of future generations, willingness to admit one's faults, readiness to accept one's limits: in themselves these are neither conservative, liberal, nor radical notions. But they are an indispensable foundation for any lasting cultural or political vision (p. 336).

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Donald D. McKim, ed. *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1986. 186 pp. \$9.95. ISBN 0-8028-0099-8.

This book was written as a tribute to Karl Barth on the hundredth anniversary of his birth. Although written for a specific occasion, it is nevertheless timeless in that it provides insight into the impact of this seminal theologian upon both the thinking and the lives of various people who are themselves significant men and women in the theological landscape today.

*How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* is a series of essays, most of them written specifically for this tribute, by people of various theological and ecclesiastical traditions, but who share the common experience of having been influenced--as we all have in the twentieth century--by Karl Barth. As with any work of this kind, the essays are of uneven length and quality. There are some very simple but moving tributes to Barth, and there are some essays which reopen some of those issues which were critical to Barth himself. A couple of the essays wander into the writers' own theological musings and thereby miss the point of the intention of this book. But most writers are on target in remembering that this book was intended not as a tribute to themselves, but to their teacher and mentor.

It is, naturally, impossible to assess each of the essays. Each reader will have to do that for himself or herself. However, two great impressions came to me as I read the book. First, there were reminders throughout of those issues which were so important to Barth--the centrality of Christ as Lord, the nature of the Church, the Christian concern for justice, or the life of obedience for the Christian. These kinds of emphases, forthrightly stated and lived out by Barth, influenced so many of the writers, whether their minds were changed, shaped or confirmed by these theological convictions. Were one teaching a seminar on Barth, I believe that this book might serve as either an introduction to the seminar, or as a fitting conclusion, so that the students might model the writers and reflect critically on how Barth may have influenced them.

Second, I was often both humored and moved by the personal stories and insights into the man, the person, the individual known as Karl Barth. Many had the privilege of knowing Barth personally and studying with him, and their anec-

dotes of this unassuming and gentle scholar are fascinating, especially for those of us who were not so privileged. One example from one of the best essays will suffice: after stating that "A rumped, lovable, old giant of learning, Barth acted toward us as a pastor," Elizabeth Achtemeier wrote,

I mention these things because it seems to me that part of the test of any theological system is the evidence of the working of that theology in the life of its author. Does that which is being propounded bear the scriptural fruit of the Spirit in the life of the propounder? Some of the leading theologians of the twentieth century fail that test, but Karl Barth did not. The faith he taught produced in him love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, self-control. He lived by what he believed and the life he lived, he lived to Christ. Perhaps that personal witness has meant more to me than anything else (pp. 108-109).

Such a well-crafted tribute hit at the core of what much of this book meant to me. *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* provides not only theological perceptions, but both spiritual and personal insights as well, which makes the reading of Barth all the more of an enriching experience for me.

Here is a book and a tribute well worth the reading. It is beyond all doubt that any who take the theological enterprise seriously have in some measure been influenced by Barth. And the variety of perceptions in this work practically guarantees that every reader will both learn and, at times, resonate with the expressions written therein.

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Richard E. Friedman and H. G. M. Williamson, editors. *The Future of Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Scripture*. SBL Semeia Studies. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987. 207 pp. \$13.95, paper. ISBN 1555400981.

Friedman and Williamson have provided us with a book that largely describes the nature of the methodologies that are in vogue among scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures to mine the riches of this ancient corpus of texts.

In general, the book highlights the common phenomenon that is now found in the field of research in the Hebrew Scriptures: a conscious concern, critique and awareness of the methods that are current over against the time-honored historical critical approach that has reigned since Wellhausen. However, in addition to



the concern for method, there is a wide-spread recognition that a multi-disciplinary approach, including a good spirit of cooperation among scholars, is functioning. Sociological, anthropological and literary criticism of a new kind are the leading elements in current study, along with a resulting new historiography. Within these disciplines a subset of women's studies has arisen that is making some headway in reading the Hebrew Scriptures from a feminist perspective.

The book is quite even in the quality of its chapters. It includes chapters by Robert A. Oden, Jr. ("Intellectual History and the Study of the Bible"), Jon D. Levensen ("The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism"), Alan Cooper ("On Reading the Bible Critically and Otherwise"), Richard Elliott Freidmann ("The Recession of Bible Source Criticism"), Baruch Halpern ("Biblical or Israelite History"), Jo Ann Hackett ("Women's Studies and the Hebrew Bible"), Tomoo Ishida ("Adonijah The Son of Haggith and His Supporters: An Inquiry into Problems About History and Historiography") and H. G. M. Williamson ("Post-Exilic Historiography"). In all of these articles, the assessment of literary genre and hence the motive and purpose of the literature, is paramount for interpretation of the text. The use of sociological, anthropological methodologies is used to buttress the analysis of literary genre more or less, according to each contributor. The future of biblical studies is projected on the basis of the current practices. The book is an excellent entree into current methodologies in the study of the Old Testament.

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Crimm, Keith, Roger A. Bullard and Larry D. Shinn, eds. *Perennial Dictionary of World Religions*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989 (1981). xviii, 830 pp.  
\$22.95, paper. ISBN: 0-06-061613-x.

This useful dictionary represents a paperback reissue, unrevised, of the *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*, published in 1981. The contributors, generally among the most able interpreters of their subject matters, treat their topics as aspects of living religious traditions. That is, not only are doctrines, beliefs and historical matters considered, but also the cultural phenomena associated with the religious traditions. Although the entries are alphabetically arranged by subject, the user is guided to the articles in the volume which relate to the major world religions, the several regional traditions (e.g., African Traditional Religion) and the very useful articles that deal with phenomena that cross the lines of religious traditions (e.g., eschatology, founders, pilgrimage and sacrifice).

Since this dictionary remains the best single-volume reference tool in its field, its reappearance in this relatively inexpensive edition is a boon to all who study world religions seriously.

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### Religious Traditions of the World Series

- Denny, Frederick. *Islam*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988. ix, 140 pp. \$7.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-06521-x
- Earhart, H. Byron. *Religions of Japan*. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. ix, 142 pp. \$7.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-062112-5.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987. xi, 144 pp. \$7.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-062655-0.
- Frankiel, Sandra S. *Christianity: A Way of Salvation*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985. viii, 135 pp. \$8.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-063015-9.
- Hultkrantz, Ake. *Native Religions of North America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988. ix, 144 pp. \$7.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-064061-8.
- Knipe, David M. *Hinduism*. New York: Harper and Row (projected for 1991).
- Lawson, E. Thomas. *Religions of Africa*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985. ix, 106 pp. \$9.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-065211-x.
- Lester, Robert C. *Buddhism: The Path to Nirvana*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987. ix, 144 pp. \$8.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-065243-8.
- Overmyer, Daniel L. *Religions of China: The World as a Living System*. New York: Harper and Row, 1986. ix, 125 pp. \$8.95, paper. ISBN 0-06-066401-0

This series of inexpensive paperback volumes on the religious traditions of the world represents an excellent resource for learning about world religions as historical and cultural traditions. Readers of these volumes learn about world faiths as they express themselves in the lives of people in community. The books are written from the point of view of the modern study of religion that prevails in the universities of North America, which attempts to treat the various religions fairly and accurately. Readers gain an insight into religions as they manifest themselves in time and space and not as their adherents or critics would like to present them. These authors tend to accentuate the positive dimensions of these traditions.



Because their authors are largely successful in presenting their subject matters fairly and positively, these books are especially useful for study in the churches and by Christians in colleges and universities. I know of no set of inexpensive books which succeeds so well at helping Christians understand why these non-Christian religious traditions are so attractive to so many of the people influenced by them. If we underestimate the attraction of these faiths to their adherents, or interpret it as enslavement to demonic and evil powers, we will be unprepared to give an effective witness to these people for our Lord.

If the books for sale in a typical evangelical bookstore are any indicator, evangelicals currently do not have much interest in understanding other people and their cultures and values. This is lamentable at a time when such an enormous opportunity for witness to people from other cultures and religions presents itself even within the borders of North America.

A study group in the church or church school could examine one of these volumes per quarter and explore the points of contact for the gospel in these traditions.

Sandra S. Frankiel's volume on Christianity will help evangelical Christian readers discern what a cultural and descriptive perspective does with the Christian faith. How does one deal with the many manifestations of the Christian tradition without advocating one manifestation as the correct one? What do all have in common? Are the differences fairly treated? The Christian experience of the volume on Christianity may also provide an indication of how adherents of the other traditions may react to the volumes dealing with their religions.

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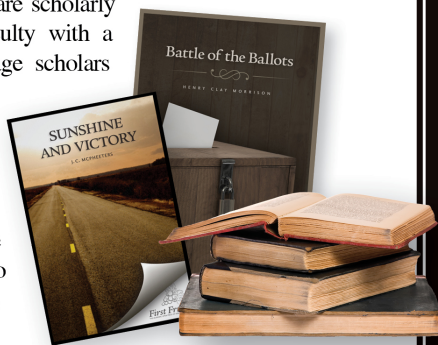
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In the Journals section, back issues of *The Asbury Journal* will be digitized and so made available to a global audience. At the same time, we are excited to be working with several faculty members on developing professional, peer-reviewed, online journals that would be made freely available.

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