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FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT—THE ONE GOD: AN EXPLORATION OF THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG

CHUCK GUTENSON

A pastor once told his congregation, in what might have been for him a moment of profound honesty, that he mistrusted anyone who claimed to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. Unfortunately, in spite of a twentieth-century resurgence of interest, many still view the Trinity as one of the greatest Christian mysteries and perhaps some, like our erstwhile pastor, tend to suspect anyone who thinks it intelligible. Wolfhart Pannenberg, the German systematic theologian, notes that as soon as "it appears that the one God can be better understood" without the doctrine, it "seems to be a superfluous addition to the concept of the one God even though it is reverently treated as a mystery of revelation."¹ These things suggest that two possibilities are open to theology. Either it can show that the one God can only be properly understood from a trinitarian construal, or it can allow the doctrine to wither as "superfluous" and unimportant. Pannenberg is convinced that the former choice is the correct one. Robert Jenson summarizes the sentiment:

Christians do not have "a God," about whose ideas Jesus then perhaps contributes some information. They have the particular God of whom the man Jesus is one identity, and who therefore is **triune in the first rather than the second place.**² [emphasis added]

Further, Jenson suggests a point that Pannenberg makes explicit in his *Systematics*—without the doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity as such cannot survive. Pannenberg expresses the point as follows:

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In fact the doctrine of the deity of Christ could not itself endure apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus would simply be viewed as a divinely inspired man and the church as a human fellowship of faith which arose under the impress of his personality, as in Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*.³

But, if the deity of Jesus falls, Christianity as such falls too, for what we have in Christianity is not primarily the admiration of a great moral teacher, but rather the claim that in Jesus Christ God himself appears on the side of humans in order to overcome sin on their behalf. Already we can sense the importance Pannenberg attaches to the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is our task to examine his trinitarian formulation and the claim that it is essential to a coherent doctrine of God.

Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity lies at the very center of his doctrine of God (which he promised in 1981 would be more trinitarian than any other he knew⁴). In a series of lectures delivered during a 1991 visit to America, he identified a number of specific revisions he felt appropriate to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.⁵ During the course of this essay, we shall have opportunity to touch upon each of them. Our discussion begins by reviewing the problems Pannenberg finds in traditional attempts to derive the Trinity. Next, we shall consider Pannenberg's basis for affirming the trinitarian nature of God, which will lead to discussion of the inner-trinitarian relations as well as the common divine essence. We shall discuss the unity of the immanent and economic Trinities and the relation between the doctrine of the Trinity and the metaphysical notion of infinity. We shall conclude with examination of Pannenberg's response to certain criticisms.

Given the monotheism of Judaism, a reasonable first question might be: why did a trinitarian conception of God arise in the first place? To answer this question, we must begin with the preaching of Jesus that was permeated with the "announcing of the nearness of the divine reign" of God—a God that Jesus referred to again and again as Father.⁶ Reference to God as Father is not unknown in the Old Testament, and if things had stayed that simple, it might have been possible to connect the God to whom Jesus referred as Father with the one God of Jewish monotheism and be done with it. However, Jesus claimed an authority for his message such that God was only to be understood as the Father whom he proclaimed.⁷ If Jesus had proclaimed his message and simply died at the hands of the religious officials, we might have seen him as another of the prophets—albeit one with a unique sense of closeness to God. However, this was impossible after the resurrection which "was seen as a divine confirmation of the claim implied in his earthly ministry, Jesus in the light of Easter had to appear as the Son of the Father whom he proclaimed."⁸ Pannenberg cites Romans 1:3-4 as central in connecting the resurrection with the Sonship of Jesus, and consequently, his deity.⁹

Once the resurrection led to affirmation of the full deity of Jesus, it was necessary to explain how the one God could be understood as fully present in him. In addition to the Father and Son, the Scriptures also speak of the Spirit of God who is distinguished from both by his role in mediating the fellowship of the Father and Jesus.¹⁰ Pannenberg summarizes:

The involvement of the Spirit in God's presence in the work of Jesus and in the fellowship of the Son with the Father is the basis of the fact that the Christian understanding of God found its developed and definitive form in the doctrine of the Trinity and not in a biunity of the Father and the Son.¹¹

Now the difficulty was not simply reconciling the biblical witness of two distinct "persons" with the monotheistic idea of one God; instead it had to show how three distinct "persons" could be one God. There is a further difficulty; while the Scriptures clearly affirm the deity of the Father, Son and Spirit, they do not expressly clarify their relations or how they are unified.

In the early church's first affirmations of the triune nature of the one God it worshiped, the fundamental question it had to answer was how the unity of this "three-personed" God was to be understood. Consequently, Pannenberg notes that early Christian theology's attention to preserving the "biblical confession of the unity of God accompanied the development of Christian statements about the deity of the Son and the Spirit."¹² As theology unfolded the meaning of its claim that both the Son and the Spirit shared the divine essence, it attempted to articulate that they share in a way that preserved the oneness of God without dissolving the distinctiveness of the persons. Pannenberg claims these attempts generally found expression in one of two ways. Either the deity of the Son and Spirit was viewed as derived from the Father as the source or "fount" of deity, or the Son and Spirit were viewed as different expressions of the Father's self-consciousness.¹³ But, will either do justice to the notion of a Triune God?

The former approach was taken by the Cappadocian fathers when they claimed that the relations were definitive of the distinctions between the Father and the Son and Spirit. They conceived of the Father as "the source and principle of deity" from which the Son and Spirit derivatively receive their deity.¹⁴ Pannenberg notes, however, that this view had been linked to subordinationism in pre-Nicene formulations. While the Son and Spirit are only God derivatively, the Father, as the source or "cause" of deity, is inevitably God in the fullest sense needing nothing outside himself for his deity.¹⁵ Do not causes always enjoy a superior ontological standing to their effects—even if only a small one? Perhaps the distinctiveness of the persons can be maintained in this fashion, but the equal deity of the persons is sacrificed.

As we shall see, the primary objection to this approach is not the use of relations to define the distinctions, but in the one-way nature of the relations. Only by understanding the relations as reciprocal can we do justice to the need for ontological equality among the persons. Consequently, Pannenberg favorably judges Athanasius' attempt to use "the logic of the relation that is posited when we call God 'Father' "¹⁶ in order to get at the mutuality of the relations. In a very real sense, the Father could not be the Father without the Son; consequently, the Father is dependent, at least after a fashion, upon the Son for his deity. The idea of reciprocity is significant, and we shall return to it momentarily.

In addition to using the notions of "source" and "fount" to get at the relation of the deity of the Son and Spirit to that of the Father, the Cappadocians attempted to explicate their unity in terms of unity of activity. They sought to avoid the charge of trithe-

ism by showing that the three persons were only one God. But does a commonality of activity really preclude ontological independence? Pannenberg correctly points out that "the idea of a collective cooperation of ontologically independent beings is not, then, ruled out" so the unity of the persons is not adequately defended and the possibility of tritheism is not precluded.¹⁷ In spite of best intentions, neither the unity nor the distinctiveness of the persons was adequately established by the Cappadocians.

The second approach (deriving the three "persons" from the self-consciousness of the Father) has appeared repeatedly. Pannenberg notes the origin of this approach dates back to the "psychological analogies" of Augustine, and that they became so influential that "they also figure in the development of what later became the normative structure of the doctrine of God to the extent that the doctrine of the unity precedes the treatment of the Trinity."¹⁸ Yet, Augustine did not intend the "psychological analogies" as attempts to derive the trinitarian distinctions; instead, he intended them as a general means of connecting the seemingly disparate notions of threeness and unity as an aid to understanding¹⁹—that is, they show the reasonableness of the Trinity once one is inclined to accept the doctrine as a tenet of faith.

Augustine intended to treat the triune nature of God as a pure impenetrable mystery of faith. Oddly, Augustine found support in the previously noted Cappadocian idea that the unity of the Trinity was to be found in the unity of the divine actions.²⁰ If the actions are such that they appear to be those of a single subject, then all attempts to get at the distinctions on the basis of the actions are ruled out from the beginning. We have already noted that tritheism cannot be ruled out on these grounds; now an additional problem becomes apparent. If no distinctions are evident, could the actions not be those of a single divine subject who simply appears in different modes? In this way, Pannenberg says, a tendency toward modalism was introduced into all efforts aimed at deriving the trinity from the unity. This problem was not a late discovery for Pannenberg notes that as early as the 12th century, Gilbert de la Porree "rejected as Sabellianism the attempt to derive the Trinity from the unity with the help of Augustine's psychological analogies."²¹

Pannenberg is sympathetic to efforts to derive the Trinity from the unity with the concept of love. He points to Richard of St. Victor who argued along the lines that "love defined as caritas has to be love of another...Hence it demands a plurality of persons."²² One of the advantages of such a conception, says Pannenberg, is that the notion of love "truly leads to the idea of personal encounter."²³ A second advantage is that the Spirit, as the third necessary for expression of unselfish love, reaches clearer distinction as a separate person. However, there are problems. Are the persons constituted by love, or must they be presupposed? Are the second and third persons generated by the love of the first? If so, we return to a single divine subject who gives rise to the others. The important thing for Pannenberg is that if the divine essence is to be conceived as love, it must be conceived as an aspect of the divine reality which is shared by all three persons—not just the possession of the first person.²⁴

Similar problems plagued Hegel's attempt to renew the doctrine of the Trinity. Pannenberg refers to Hegel's adoption and expansion of Lessing's attempt to ground the Trinity "in the concept of Spirit as an expression of the self-understanding of God

in self-awareness" as the "classical form" of the "doctrine of the Trinity in terms of self-conscious Spirit."²⁵ Again we have a single divine subject whose self-expression takes on three forms. Finally, Pannenberg claims that even Barth's attempt to reground the doctrine of the Trinity in the revelation of Christ fell short when he used the "formal concept of revelation as self-revelation" wherein Barth posited an object, a subject and a revelation itself.²⁶ Here Pannenberg finds once again a single divine subject which precludes any real space for a plurality of persons.

All these attempts fell short in a very fundamental way—they failed to adequately connect, in a clear and essential fashion, the trinitarian statements about the three persons with the unity of God.²⁷ In the 16th century, this led to a number of attacks from; some challenging the supporting biblical exegesis while others questioned the reasonableness of the doctrine. In the 17th and 18th century, theology focused its attention upon discovering the doctrine in revelation. Roger Olson claims that this gave the impression that the unity was rationally demonstrable while the Trinity was a matter of special revelation, and that "from there it was a small step to the atrophy of the doctrine in Enlightenment religion and liberal Protestant theology."²⁸ At the end of detailed discussion of various attempts to derive the doctrine of the Trinity, Pannenberg comes to the following conclusion:

Any derivation of the plurality of trinitarian persons from the essence of the one God, whether it be viewed as spirit or love, leads into the problems of either modalism on the one hand or subordinationism on the other. Neither, then, can be true to the intentions of the trinitarian dogma.²⁹

If the Trinity cannot be derived from the presupposed unity of God, what options are left? Pannenberg says we must begin with the revelation of Father, Son and Spirit in salvation history,³⁰ the starting point is "the revelation of God in Jesus Christ."³¹

Pannenberg favors reformation thinkers who argued that the doctrine of the Trinity had to be taken from the Scriptures rather than from speculative derivations. He writes that they "saw more clearly than many later theologians that as God reveals himself, so he is in his eternal deity."³² Why so? Pannenberg notes Jesus' claim that "no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).³³ During the last supper, Jesus says to Philip that whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father.³⁴ In light of Easter, we have already noted that the claims of Jesus' earthly ministry stand confirmed by God. Consequently, it follows that the revelation of the Father, as contained in the message of Jesus, cannot be superseded and that God is, in his eternal deity, as he was revealed by the Son. For these reasons, construction of the doctrine of the Trinity must begin with examination of the revelation of Christ.

As this point will be important for subsequent discussions, a bit by way of further expansion is appropriate. It was Karl Barth who argued that if the revelation of Jesus is to have ultimacy and reveal God as he is, then God, in his eternity, must coincide with the revelation in Christ.³⁵ Karl Rahner, concerned with showing that the incarnation was not accidentally connected to the eternity of God, further developed the position into the thesis that the immanent Trinity (God as he is in his eternal life) is

identical with the economic Trinity (God as revealed in salvation history).³⁶ The point is significant for only if the economic “sendings” of the Son and Spirit into salvation history are intimately connected with their inner-trinitarian relations to the Father can the biblical witness of salvation history give means to affirm the inner-Triune nature of God. Consequently, “the concrete relation of Jesus to the Father must be the starting place for trinitarian reflection.”³⁷ We shall return to this point (known as Rahner’s Rule) in our discussion of the immanent and economic Trinities.

Examination of the revelation in Christ, however, reveals that things are not as simple as one might like—there is no express formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity anywhere to be found either “in the message of Jesus [or] in the NT witness-es.”³⁸ While the deity of the Son and the Spirit are clearly affirmed, “it is not clear how the deity of the Son and Spirit relates to that of the Father.”³⁹ Consequently, we must proceed with systematic reconstruction from the biblical witness regarding the relations of the Son and Spirit to the Father. This is the same path the Greek fathers took in speaking of the Father as “origin” and “fount” of deity. Pannenberg affirms the approach, though we must not repeat the errors of subordinationism or modalism.

It is appropriate to pause and summarize briefly. Pannenberg’s first revision to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity is a negative one—the Trinity cannot be derived from an abstract concept of the one God.⁴⁰ Second, Pannenberg is unwilling to take the path followed by some—simply denying the doctrine of the Trinity as a later Hellenization of Christianity.⁴¹ In fact, he recognizes that the Trinity can only stand if it is essential to the explication of the one God, and he proposes to show this is the case. Third, Pannenberg affirms that the beginning place for explication of the Trinity is with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Finally, since the Scriptures contain no explicit trinitarian formula, the development of the doctrine must be by systematic reconstruction from the biblical evidences regarding the relations between the Father, Son and Spirit.

So, if the revelation in Christ is the starting point, the next question is obvious: what does that revelation demonstrate about the relations between the Father and the Son? Traditionally, theology has adduced passages such as John 1:14 and John 3:16 and claimed that the relations flow one way from the Father to the Son and can be expressed by the term “begotten”—the Father begets the Son. Yet, if this is all we can say, we have not yet escaped the ontological subordination implied by one way relations of origin. There are two very closely related questions that must be asked next. First, does the revelation in Christ give us grounds for affirming other relations between Father and Son? Second, are there grounds for supporting a mutuality of relations so that the Son is not only dependent upon the Father for his deity, but so that the Father is also dependent upon the Son?

If we examine the message of Jesus, Pannenberg claims we find that Jesus “distinguishes himself from God and sets himself as a creature below God as he asks his hearers to do.”⁴² Pannenberg points to the Johannine gospel wherein “Christ says that the Father is greater than he (14:28)” and wherein Jesus claims that the words he speaks are the Father’s and not his own (14:24). In Mark, Jesus refuses to accept the title “good Teacher” since only God is good.⁴³ Pannenberg gives other evidences, but

the point is the same—Jesus, as opposed to the first Adam who sought equality with God, self-differentiates himself from the Father and submits himself to the Father. Here we must note a thesis from one of Pannenberg's earlier works: "communion and unity with God increase in the same proportion as the modesty of the creature in distinguishing itself from God."⁴⁴ Consequently, as Jesus self-differentiates himself from the Father and subordinates himself to the Father, he fulfills the mission for which he was sent and thereby is "so at one with the Father that God in eternity is Father only in relation to him."⁴⁵ Since God is Father only in relation to Jesus, "the Son shares [the Father's] deity as the eternal counterpart of the Father."⁴⁶ And, according to Rahner's Rule, this is indicative of an eternal, inner-Triune relation.

From the preceding, we see a degree of mutuality in the relations between Father and Son—the Father is only Father in relation to Jesus as Son. However, Pannenberg goes on to ask whether there might be similar self-distinction from the Son on the Father's side. The Scriptures speak of the Father's handing over the kingdom to the Son. The Father hands all authority over to the Son who must execute that authority until he brings everything under his reign, then the Son hands back the kingdom to the Father and finally subjects himself to the Father's rule so "that God may be all in all."⁴⁷ Now we have a true mutuality of relations for the Father, by virtue of the handing over of the kingdom, makes himself dependent upon the Son for his own deity: he is dependent upon the Son fulfilling his mission and handing back the kingdom. Again, by Rahner's Rule, this relation defines an inner-Trinitarian relation so that the Father, in the eternal divine life, is in fact dependent upon the Son for his deity.

With the notion of self-distinction as a principle for getting at inner-Trinitarian relations, one now asks if it also applies to the Spirit. Pannenberg points us to the Johannine gospel where it is said of the Spirit: "Precisely by not speaking of himself (John 16:23) but bearing witness to Jesus (15:26) and reminding us of his teaching (14:26), he shows himself to be the Spirit of truth."⁴⁸ The Spirit distinguishes himself from the Father and the Son and shows himself to be separate from both; and by glorifying the Son, and in him the Father, the Spirit shows himself to be one with the Father and the Son.⁴⁹ Consequently, even though self-distinction and self-subjection are somewhat different for the Spirit, they are still the principles whereby the Spirit shows himself to be distinct from the other two and whereby he receives his deity.

In order to have a truly reciprocal relationship, the Father and the Son must also be dependent upon the Spirit for their deity. As the Spirit is the "condition and the medium of [the] fellowship [of the Father and Son]," the imparting of the Spirit brings believers into their fellowship.⁵⁰ Consequently, the Spirit participates in the realization of the kingdom among humans, and thus we see one way in which the rule/deity of the Father (and thus the Son) is dependent upon the Spirit.

Perhaps, the best example of the mutual dependency of the Trinitarian persons is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. At the crucifixion, the deity of all three members is brought into question. If Jesus is not raised, it is shown that he was not the Son. Further if the Son is not raised, he will not be able to submit all things and hand the rule back over to the Father. If the Spirit does not raise the Son, his status as Creator of life is seriously damaged. While the deity of all members is threatened,

"decisive significance attaches, however, to the work of the Spirit as the creative origin of all life."⁵¹ By recognizing the special significance of the work of the Spirit, we further amplify the dependence of the others upon the Spirit since their deity is secured by the Spirit's raising of Jesus.

Pannenberg states that one may affirm the relations between the Father on the one hand, and the Son and Spirit on the other as relations of origin (the Son is begotten, the Spirit proceeds), but to see them exclusively as such leads to subordinationism. However, if the persons are dependent upon each other for their deity, so that the relations are fully reciprocal, Pannenberg claims that ontological subordination is overcome. Similarly, the notion of self-distinction leads us beyond modalism for clearly we have three persons and not one subject simply appearing in different modes. Pannenberg summarizes as follows:

If the trinitarian relations among Father, Son and Spirit have the form of mutual self-distinction, they must be understood not merely as different modes of being of the one divine subject, but as living realizations of separate centers of action.⁵²

With the threats of modalism and subordinationism behind, that of tritheism arises; consequently, we must turn to Pannenberg's demonstration that the three persons are only one God and that the "doctrine of the Trinity is in fact concrete monotheism."⁵³

In discussing the unity of the trinitarian persons, three points need to be considered. First, implicit in our discussion has been the modern subordination of the concept of substance to that of relation. In Aristotelian categories, relations were conceived as accidents that belonged to a substance that was ontologically prior. However, modern thought has reversed this connection so that relation is now seen as primary and substance subordinated.⁵⁴ With Hegel, Pannenberg holds that a fundamental element of the logical structure of substance is its relatedness to another. Consequently, the divine essence must be understood as defined relationally, and not simply as an abstract "thing" lying behind the relations. We have seen that Pannenberg finds the relations constitutive for the persons of the Trinity as well as for their deity—they are each only God as they are related to each other in the divine life mirrored in the economic Trinity.⁵⁵

The second point is the importance of the monarchy of the Father. First, we have already seen that Pannenberg rejects any notion of the Father's monarchy that results in ontological subordination, but this does not mean rejection of the monarchy of the Father *per se*. As a matter of fact, it is precisely the self-subordination of the Son and the Spirit in their acts of self-distinction that supports the monarchy of the Father without ontological subordination. Now, we must combine this insight with the constitutive nature of the relations. Is the monarchy of the Father threatened by the mutual dependence implied by the relations? Not at all; in fact, it means that his monarchy is mediated to him through the Son and the Spirit. As Pannenberg writes:

By their work the Son and Spirit serve the monarchy of the Father. Yet the Father does not have his kingdom or monarchy without the Son and Spirit, but only through them.⁵⁶

The mutual goal of the trinitarian persons is the establishment of the monarchy of the Father over all creation. However, there is a significant point to keep in mind: the Father's monarchy does not have logical precedence over the Son and the Spirit, for this would lead toward subordination. Instead, the monarchy of the Father is the result of the "common operation of the three persons" and is, thus, "the seal of their unity."⁵⁷

The third and final point we must consider is the precise nature of the divine essence. We know that it is constituted relationally, and that it takes outward expression in the mutual cooperation of the three persons for whom the monarchy of the Father is a goal. Now, the question is whether we can say more about the divine essence so characterized. Jenson, working from Pannenberg's essay entitled "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," summarizes Pannenberg's answer in three steps. First, Jenson points out traditional theology's problematic understanding of the divine attributes and inner-trinitarian relations that stem from its "obedience to the metaphysical prejudice that 'being' is self-enclosure, transcendence of relation."⁵⁸ This resulted in separation of the inner-trinitarian relations from the divine attributes that God has in relation to creation (righteousness, mercy, wisdom, etc.) and from the divine attributes which describe God's essentiality, the so-called "omni-" attributes.⁵⁹ However, as we noted above, essence or "being" is now seen as primarily constituted by relations, and this opens the way to rethinking these attributes in terms of the constitutive relations.

Second, Jenson quotes Pannenberg's claim that the so-called "omni-" attributes all "relate back to the concept of infinity."⁶⁰ Pannenberg credits Hegel with showing that the truly Infinite is only that which overcomes the distinction between finite and Infinite and thereby appears with the finite as well as is transcendent to it.⁶¹ Jenson notes that the "word for such a relation, where it is concretely realized [is] love."⁶² Pannenberg notes that "the phrase 'God is love' represents the concretization of the abstract structure of the concept of infinity."⁶³ The relations between God and creation (righteousness, mercy, etc.), then, are concrete expressions of God's infinity.

The third step is the recognition that love is not simply one divine attribute among others, but "according to 1 John 4:8, 16, love as the power that manifests itself in the mutual relations of the trinitarian persons is **identical with the divine essence**."⁶⁴ [emphasis added] It is not simply that God has love; the very divine essence itself is love. The relations that have been discussed are all expressions of that mutual love. Consequently, the claim that "God is love" captures the fullness of the trinitarian fellowship. Further, if there is only one divine essence ("the relationally-structured love which unifies without obliterating distinctions"⁶⁵), then there is only one God who, nonetheless, is concretely realized in three distinct persons. Thus Pannenberg writes (expanding upon the quote from above):

Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact concrete monotheism in contrast to notions of an abstract transcendence of the one God and abstract notions of a divine unity that leave no place for plurality; so that the one God is in fact a mere correlate of the present world and the plurality of the finite.⁶⁶

Pannenberg thus forges a doctrine of the Trinity which he believes overcomes the

concerns of tritheism on the one hand, and subordinationism and modalism on the other.

While this discussion has outlined, as Pannenberg sees it, the unity of the trinitarian persons, one other area related to the unity of God needs attention: the unity of the immanent and the economic Trinities. Rahner's Rule that the immanent and economic Trinities are identical seems simple enough, but it must be carefully applied. Pannenberg credits Kasper with correctly pointing out that the equation of the two must not result in absorption of the immanent Trinity into the economic—as if salvation history were necessary for God's eternal self-identity.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the strength of Rahner's proposal is that it does away with the apparent independence of the economic and immanent Trinities that arose when early philosophical theology, guided by Hellenistic conceptions, viewed the divine essence as "untouched by the course of history on account of the eternity and immutability of God."⁶⁸ The questions are: how forcefully should one push the identity of the immanent and economic Trinities? and, how ought that identity be understood?

Two insights are important here. First, there is Pannenberg's claim that God's deity is his rule.⁶⁹ Second, and closely related, is Pannenberg's claim that, while the existence of a world is not necessary to God's deity, should God create a world, God would hardly be God apart from his ruling it.⁷⁰ Pannenberg connects these two notions with the previous discussion regarding the mutual interdependency of the persons when he writes:

Even in his deity, by the creation of the world and the sending of his Son and Spirit to work in it, he has made himself dependent upon the course of history. This results from the dependence of the trinitarian persons upon one another as the kingdom is handed over and handed back in connection with the economy of salvation and the intervention of the Son and Spirit in the world and its history.⁷¹

Recall that Rahner's thesis was first worked out with regard to the incarnation of the Son. Specifically, the incarnation was not simply a task appropriated by one of the Trinitarian persons who just happened to be the Son; instead, it was the salvation historical expression of an inner-trinitarian relation between the Son and the Father and Spirit. Further, we have already seen that the crucifixion called into question the deity of all three persons of the Trinity. But, if the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, it was in fact the immanent Trinity that was called into question in the events surrounding the crucifixion. Taking the next step, if once God has created a world his deity is only consistent with his ruling it and if his kingdom is not yet fully present in the world, in light of Rahner's Rule, it becomes obvious that "the immanent Trinity itself, the deity of the trinitarian God, is at issue in the events of history."⁷² For Rahner's thesis to be taken seriously, Pannenberg believes it must be taken at least this far.

The danger is that the immanent Trinity becomes so closely linked with the world's history that the economy of salvation becomes the means by which God develops into that which he is to be. To avoid this, priority has to be given to the immanent Trinity so that God is who he is "from eternity to eternity." How shall we

reconcile these seemingly disparate notions of eternal self-identity and dependence upon the course of history? Pannenberg utilizes a central tenet of his theological enterprise—the ontological priority of the future. If the kingdom should come, as Christians anticipate based upon the proleptic appearance of Christ, then it will become clear that God has been who he is all along. In Pannenberg's words, "the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity."⁷³

Some have asked whether this simply means that our knowledge is made accurate by the coming of the kingdom thereby implying the "dependence" of God upon the course of history is merely an epistemological matter. However, Pannenberg would reject such an understanding. When a future state of affairs is necessary for a given thing/event to have its essence/meaning, then the change resulting from the occurrence of that future state of affairs is not epistemological, but is truly constitutive of the essence of the thing/event. So, if God's kingdom comes, then it will finally be decided, for all eternity, that God is who he is. If the kingdom does not come, then God's deity is refuted, also for all eternity. In Pannenberg's view then, it is simply that the eschaton is "the locus of that decision." This being the intent of Pannenberg's claim is clear from his comparison of the retroactive power of the eschatological consummation for God's deity with the retroactive power of the resurrection for the identity of Jesus as the Son.⁷⁴

In this way, Pannenberg conceives the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity which allows for the debatability of God's existence in the world today, while maintaining the eternal self-identity of God so that the history of the world is not necessary for his becoming. This also opens the way for articulating the notions of God's eternity and his immutability in a more biblical fashion. Pannenberg (and others such as Jüngel, Moltmann, and Jenson) believes that the correct starting point for reworking these doctrines is the doctrine of the Trinity.⁷⁵ Let us now turn attention to the manner in which the Trinity makes possible conceiving of God as truly Infinite.

A fundamental requirement imposed upon the doctrine of God by the philosophical notion of the Infinite is that it be able to support the seemingly disparate notions of transcendence and immanence. A single, transcendental divine subjectivity does not accomplish this, and Pannenberg argues that only with a concept of God as a differentiated unity (something like a trinitarian conception) can such reconciliation occur. In discussion of God's omnipresence and omnipotence (recall we have observed that the "omni-" attributes are expressions of God's infinity), Pannenberg makes the solution explicit:

The doctrine of the Trinity made it possible so to link the transcendence of the Father in heaven with his presence in believers through the Son and Spirit that in virtue of the consubstantiality and perichoresis of the three persons the Father...could be viewed as present and close to believers through the Son and Spirit.⁷⁶

And now the pieces fall into place. The Father is transcendent, but the Son and Spirit,

by their being sent into the world, are present with the creatures in their places. As a consequence of the unity of the divine essence, we can affirm that the Father is also present with his creatures and, thus, this one God is both transcendent to and immanent within the world. It only remains to make the connections explicit in the various "omni-" attributes.

Pannenberg connects God's omnipotence to the notion of infinity by showing that omnipotence simply viewed as opposition to all others who have power is one-sidedly transcendent. God's omnipotence is demonstrated by its appearance along side the creatures—specifically, in the act of self-distinction wherein the Son becomes a creature in order to provide a means of rescuing the creatures from the nothingness into which they had fallen by the assertion of their independence.⁷⁷ With regard to God's eternity, it is again the incarnation of the Son which "sets aside the antithesis of eternity and time" so that the kingdom of the Father may be present through the appearing of the Son.⁷⁸ Finally, Pannenberg notes that, in general, unity of the Infinite and the finite, as required by the philosophical concept of the Infinite, which appears insoluble in its logical form without loss of distinction between the two, is only soluble with a trinitarian concept of God. And now the reversal Pannenberg called for is complete—he has shown that it is only possible to construct a coherent doctrine of the one Christian God with the doctrine of the Trinity as foundation. Only with a trinitarian conception of God can justice be done to the revelation in Christ. And only with a trinitarian conception of God can the divine attributes relating to God's infinity, which have been so problematic throughout the history of theology, be satisfactorily treated.

In addition to solving the problem of applying the metaphysical notion of infinity to God, Pannenberg believes a trinitarian conception provides the resources necessary for responding to Fichte's criticisms that arise from conceiving God as personal: 1) the claim that the notion of personality is an anthropomorphic projection, and 2) the claim that God's personality stands in contradiction to his infinity. In responding to the first objection, Pannenberg argues that the inner-trinitarian conception of personality is the source of the human conception of personality. Specifically, he writes:

Historically, these features of human personality emerge only in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity as its concept of person, constituted by relations to others, is transferred to anthropology.⁷⁹

Pannenberg goes on to recognize the differences one must admit between the trinitarian persons and human persons, but the important point for our discussion is that modern conceptions of personality did not develop independent of religion, but rather from reflection of the triune God and the relations between the three persons. If this is correct, application of the notion of personality was from God to humans, and Fichte's criticism falls.

With regard to the second objection Pannenberg accepts the claim that relationality is essential for personality so that if we are to understand God as personal, we must be able to affirm that personality in terms of relation to something else. If the Christian doctrine of the one God were an abstract, transcendental conception of a

single, divine subjectivity, then something outside of God (like a world) would be necessary for God's personhood. Without a trinitarian conception of God, this line of reasoning would be disastrous for it would lead to either finitization of God (limiting him to the person that stands opposed to the finite world) or pantheism (maintaining God's infinity by absorbing the world into it, and deserting his personhood).⁸⁰ It is precisely the doctrine of the Trinity that shows how the relationality necessary for conceiving the one God as personal can occur within his differentiated unity. This secures God's creative freedom (he need not create a world), and it makes possible the coherent application of the notions of infinity and personality to God.

It is now time to consider some of the questions Pannenberg's doctrine will undoubtedly face. First, does it avoid the charge of subordinationism—particularly with his emphasis upon the monarchy of the Father?⁸¹ Can we maintain the equal deity of the persons if the Father is God in a special sense? Pannenberg clearly argues that we can. It is precisely the point of the mutuality of relations between the Father, Son and Spirit which is intended to overcome any hint of ontological subordination. Since the persons are all mutually dependent upon each other for their deity, Pannenberg argues that their ontological status is equivalent. Self-subjection, he says, does not lead to ontological subordination. But, is the charge of subordination overcome—even if it is a unique sort of subordination?

It seems the matter hinges upon a pair of questions: 1) does the tradition's affirmation of the equal deity of the persons imply more than ontological equality? and 2) do distinctions of "rank" imply ontological inequality? As to the first question, it seems clear that the credal affirmations focus upon ontologically equivalent deity. Important phrases include: "very God of very God," "Light of Light," "of one substance," and "who with the Father and the Son is worshiped together and glorified together." Is there more than ontological equivalence at stake? It does not seem so. Also, the tradition has recognized that the persons, as they appear in salvation history, have different roles, which implies that ontological equality is not intended to mean indistinguishability of works. By Rahner's Rule, the salvation historical roles correspond to real inner-trinitarian distinctions. One is hard pressed to see more than ontological equivalence at stake here, or how different roles implies ontological inequality.

This leads us to the second question: do distinctions of "rank" imply ontological inequality? In virtually every sort of relationship known where ontologically equivalent beings interact, distinctions of rank are common. The fact that one individual is the president of a company and others employees does not imply ontological inequality (especially should the others make the president). The same is true of military organizations, and much more appropriately, of family relationships. Granted these comparisons have a weakness. The organizational subordination indicated in the first two examples may include a conflict of some sort—perhaps the person lower in rank does not want to subject himself. In the latter, the father is temporally prior. However, we can remedy these problems by noting the co-eternality of the persons of the Trinity and by remembering that the Son and Spirit willingly subject themselves. In light of these considerations, it is hard to see how Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity is subordinationistic even though it may contain something of the notion of "rank"—that is a "rank" constituted by the self-subjection of the others. For these reasons, I cannot

concur with those who would accuse Pannenberg of subordinationism.

Any doctrine of the Trinity which gives strong affirmation of the distinction of the persons will likely be accused of tritheism. Does Pannenberg's doctrine successfully avoid tritheism? Perhaps this matter can also be addressed by considering a pair of questions: 1) can any understanding of God which reduces the content of the Trinity to a single divine subject ever be adequate? and 2) does the reciprocity of relations proposed by Pannenberg show that the three persons are one God? The first question has already been answered. To summarize: first, it is doubtful whether any meaningful notion of God remains if he cannot be conceived as personal. Second, personality is a relational concept so that if we are to conceive a being as personal, it must have something to stand over against. Third, this means that either we need a concept of God where the relationality exists within God, or some world becomes necessary for God. We have argued that the latter is not an acceptable possibility for it surrenders divine freedom and finitizes God; thus, the short answer to the first question is no. Thus, the second question becomes critical.

Let us ask one further question: under what conditions could we affirm that distinct persons share a single essence and are, then, one? Jenson summarizes Pannenberg's discussion of personality from *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*:

If one person's will were to be so directed to the will of another person as to be in "absolute practiced unity of will" with the other, achieved in "complete abandonment of self" to that other, and if that unity of will were confirmed by the other, this would amount to the reality of a personal being which is one for both persons.⁸²

This particular discussion relates to the unity of the Father and Son, but doesn't the reciprocity of the inner-trinitarian relations, the mutual commitment to the monarchy of the Father, and the self-subjection of the Son and the Spirit bear a striking resemblance? In the Trinity, we have three persons who have a "unity of will" oriented toward the monarchy of the Father and a mutual love which could only be described as "complete abandonment of self" to the others. Can we say that three persons so intimately bound together are really one? It certainly seems so.

It is worth noting that some have compared Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity to the so-called social analogies.⁸³ Oddly enough, Pannenberg himself is not sympathetic to social trinitarianism.⁸⁴ Why not? Because, he argues, we know of no societies which would really be analogous to the trinitarian relations. All societies, we know, are made up of autonomous, independent beings—none with beings who are what they are only in relation to each other. We know of societies which imperfectly realize the bond of love—none within which that bond is so perfectly realized that there is mutual, unreserved self-giving of each to the others. We know of societies wherein individuals struggle to be at the top—none wherein members willingly and totally subject themselves to the monarchy of another. If the members of the Trinity constitute a society, it is so radically different from anything else we call a society that the analogy is hopelessly flawed from the beginning.

So, has Pannenberg solved the problem of tritheism? There will undoubtedly be those who claim that he has not, but is the objection reasonable? Pannenberg has shown that a single, transcendent divine reality does not work, and he has given us the salvation historical evidence for the plurality of persons. He has shown how the

reciprocity of relations ought be understood so that the persons are fully dependent upon each other not just for their personhood, but also for their deity. Finally, he has demonstrated the singularity of the divine essence, which is a relationally-structured love that is constitutive of a degree of intimate fellowship beyond anything else known. This writer concludes that this adequately demonstrates both the necessity of the plurality and the reality of the unity, and therefore, avoids tritheism.

The last question that needs response is whether or not Pannenberg's Christology is adoptionistic. Olson notes that this question has important consequences for if it is, it would be possible to "dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity based on it as merely 'economic.'"⁸⁵ Pannenberg readily admits that no necessity attaches to the Son's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth—i.e. it is hypothetically possible that the Son could have been incarnate in someone else.⁸⁶ Does this imply adoptionism? Pannenberg claims that it does not because the man Jesus was not adopted by God at some particular point during his life. As a matter of fact, while it is possible that the Son could have been incarnate in someone else, this does not mean that the decision to become incarnate in Jesus was not made in God's eternity "before the foundation of the world." Pannenberg holds that this "eternal decision" to become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth preserves both the creatureliness of Jesus while avoiding adoptionism. Further, the human Jesus was not already existing prior to incarnation by the logos (which would imply adoptionism), but is in fact constituted by the incarnation. Of course, once the incarnation in Jesus had become reality, all of the consequences of the handing over and the handing back which make the Father's deity dependent upon the Son become a reality with regard to Jesus as Son. In light of the "eternal decision"—and the constitutive nature of the incarnation for the human person Jesus, it seems Pannenberg is justified in denying his doctrine is adoptionistic.

In the course of this essay, we have investigated Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity in some detail. During the 1991 American tour, Pannenberg commented to one professor that volume one of his forthcoming Systematics would be about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—and so would volume two and so would volume three. Even a casual perusal of these volumes reveals how Pannenberg again and again appeals to the trinitarian conception of God to breathe life into the other aspects of his systematic reconstruction of the Christian faith. Over the next several decades, the tradition will judge Pannenberg's contribution, but it does not seem rash to suggest that he will be judged a major contributor to recentering the Christian doctrine of God on a trinitarian conception.⁸⁷

Notes

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), p. 291.
2. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton, eds., *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), p. 202.
3. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 292.
4. Quoted by R. Olson in "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity" in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 43 (1990): 176.
5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion on the Trinitarian Doctrine," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 46 (Fall 1991): 31-35.
6. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 259.

7. Ibid., p. 264.
8. Ibid., p. 264.
9. Ibid., p. 264, for example.
10. Ibid., p. 266.
11. Ibid., p. 268.
12. Ibid., p. 274.
13. See Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 180ff. for more details.
14. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 279.
15. Ibid., p. 289.
16. Ibid., p. 278.
17. Ibid., p. 279.
18. Ibid., p. 282.
19. Ibid., p. 284.
20. Ibid., p. 283.
21. Ibid., p. 282 and 287.
22. Ibid., p. 286.
23. Ibid.
24. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 183.
25. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 292.
26. Ibid., p. 296.
27. Pannenberg points this out once each on three consecutive pages in *Systematic Theology*, p. 290, 291, 292.
28. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 183.
29. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 298.
30. Ibid., p. 299.
31. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, taken from the first subsection title of section 3 of Pannenberg's chapter entitled "The Trinitarian God," which reads, in its entirety, "The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the starting point, and the traditional terminology of the doctrine of the Trinity."
32. Ibid., p. 300.
33. Ibid., p. 264.
34. John 13:9.
35. Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God," p. 29.
36. Ibid., p. 29.
37. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 307.
38. Ibid., p. 301.
39. Ibid., p. 302.
40. For specific discussion, see Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God," p. 31.
41. Ibid., compare discussion on p. 28ff.
42. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 309.
43. Ibid., all Scriptural references from p. 309.
44. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 187, paraphrasing Pannenberg.
45. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 310.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 312.
48. Ibid., p. 315.
49. Ibid., p. 315.
50. Ibid., p. 316, see also p. 281.
51. Ibid., p. 315.

52. Ibid., p. 319.
53. Ibid., p. 335.
54. Ted Peters, "Trinity Talk: Part II, *Dialog* (1987), pp. 133-135 for a good summary of this point.
55. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 319-325.
56. Ibid., p. 324.
57. Ibid., p. 325.
58. Braaten and Clayton, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 204.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., Jenson quoting Pannenberg.
61. This is a central point for Pannenberg's doctrine of God, and those wishing more detail see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), chap. 2, where a detailed defense is given.
62. Braaten and Clayton, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 205.
63. Ibid., Jenson quoting Pannenberg from "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine," trans. Philip Clayton *Dialog*, 26(1987): 250-257.
64. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 427.
65. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 195.
66. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 335-336.
67. Ibid., pp. 330-331. See also, Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," pp. 198-199.
68. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 332.
69. See for example, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 55-56.
70. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 313.
71. Ibid., p. 329.
72. Ibid., p. 330.
73. Ibid., p. 331.
74. For the latter discussion, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Williams and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 133-138.
75. Braaten and Clayton, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 197.
76. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 415.
77. Ibid., pp. 415-422.
78. Ibid., pp. 445-446.
79. Ibid., p. 430. Pannenberg refers us for further detail to his own *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985], p. 236) and other works cited therein.
80. See Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 177.
81. Ibid., see, for example, p. 203ff.
82. Braaten and Clayton, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 193.
83. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine." He quotes Wagner on p. 192 and implies he agrees on p. 202.
84. From personal conversation in January 1994.
85. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine," p. 188.
86. Pannenberg affirmed this in personal conversation and went on to say that if this were not true, it seems it would destroy the creatureliness of Jesus.
87. I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Pannenberg for allowing my several discussions in late 1993 and early 1994, and for his review and comment on an earlier version of this paper.

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS IN AFRICA

ADAM K.A. CHEPKWONY

Today the African peoples have come to know who they are after many years under foreign power. They no longer ask the question, "Who am I?" as Bonhoeffer did in his poem,¹ but rather their attitudes are characterized by Christian hymns extolling their African identity.² They recognize their rich religious heritage and hence refuse to be accused of being "pagan." Now that a large number of African peoples have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ they want to seek ways to integrate Christ into their culture. This has necessitated the following questions:

Is it possible for Africans to lead a rich spiritual life and worship God in their own ways?

Is it necessary to copy European norms and liturgy?

Since worship can be regarded as a constant creation of the Holy Spirit, why shouldn't Africans feel free to innovate and pray in their own way?

Such questions have brought about the quest for a theology in Africa. As a result, a variety of theologies have emerged in recent years. This paper examines some of these basic trends in theological reflection in Africa, in particular, African Theology, Black Theology in South Africa and African Christian Theology. Further, it seeks to show an inner cohesion among these trends towards the final emergence of an authentic Christian Theology in Africa.

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AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Problem of Definition

Since there has not been any definite or clear definitions of African Theology, different theologians, both Africans and non-Africans have seen and defined it in their own ways. John Mbiti, probably one of the greatest exponents of African Theology, says the following concerning the term "African Theology."

Indeed the term...has its limitation and ambiguities; it says both nothing and everything at the same time. Some people are using it as an ideological spring board; others fear it and consider it to be a demonic threat to the Christian faith in Africa.³

Mbiti, in his book, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, is not even sure that the term can be defined. He writes "It is all too easy to use the phrase 'African Theology,' but to state exactly what that means, or even to show its real nature, is an entirely different issue."⁴ He further explains that such a theology could not be uniform throughout the continent of Africa. He concludes, "Theological systems and schools of thought will, let us hope, emerge, and it is these, rather than a single static system which together may constitute *Theologia Africana*."⁵

In his effort to define African theology, J. Mugambi, in his recent book, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, concludes; "African Theology may thus imply (1) African Christian Theology (or African Muslim Theology); or (2) African Religious Tradition (referring to non-Christian and non-Muslim African traditions)."⁶

A few other scholars like Turner⁷, Kato⁸, Diadanso⁹ and others have expressed the difficulties brought about by the term "African Theology." The impression given by this term is that it is possible to have one theology in Africa. Yet, as suggested by Mugambi above, Africa has many theologies. We can even go on to say that there are varieties of Christian, Muslim and other theologies in Africa. I suggest, therefore, that the term "African Theology" is misleading and confusing and that the term, "African Theologies" should be used to refer to various theologies in Africa.

CONTENT OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

The true nature and origin of African Theology can be ascribed to Dr. J.K. Agbeti. He represents the thoughts of most theologians in Africa today who draw a sharp distinction between African Theology and Christian Theology. The following quotation will give us an idea of what African Theology is, as understood by Agbeti and those scholars in his circle.

The idea of "African Theology" seems to have been confused with the idea of "Christian Theology" as it may be expressed by African Theologians using African thought forms. Thus it is my intention...to show that "African Theology" is distinct from Christian Theology....Thus we may think of different kinds of theologies, e.g. Christian Theology, Islamic Theology, Old Testament Theology, Hindu Theology, African Theology, etc. Consequently when we talk about "African Theology we should mean the interpretation of the pre-Christian and pre-Moslem African people's experience of God."¹⁰

According to Agbeti, African Theology is a return to African traditional religious experience—the practices of African peoples before Christianity and Islam were introduced to them. How do we understand Agbeti's idea of African Theology? It seems to me that he is suggesting that we do away with Christianity since we do not need it, we never needed it, and will never need it; with it also is the Islamic religion—but give us back the religion of our ancestors. This kind of attitude presupposes the validity of the African religions with regards to God's direct revelation to the worshipper. Salvation is possible in African religion, according to Agbeti, for he says that "the traditional African has a living experience with God quite distinct from the Christian experience of God."¹¹

The primary source for African Theology, according to Agbeti, is not the Bible. The source material for African Theology has to be gathered from Africa and its traditional religions. If the Bible is to be used at all, it will only serve to support that which is already found in the traditional religions. Hence he writes:

Materials about African religion are being collected and collated regionally. From these regional sources, could grow a religion which could be truly called African Religion. It will be from this source that an "African Theology" may be developed, a theology which will critically systematize the traditional African experience of God, of God and his relation with man, of man and his relation with God, of the spiritual universe, of Sin, etc.¹²

Agbeti's "African Theology" is an attempt to state African peoples' thought about God and as such is not Christian nor is it biblically based.

Christianity, according to those who agree with Agbeti, is a "cold and cruel religion" which has caused frequent strife between the converted and the traditional religionists. For them missionaries did more harm than good, "They scared our people with stories of hell," they insist. "They painted their God as a demanding God who wanted worship 'or else'."¹³

The Rev. Solomon Lediga in the context of South African Black Theology would feel at home with what Agbeti has to say. He makes no distinction between Black Theology and traditional African religions. He sees a very close relation and no tension between the two. According to him, Black Theology "originates in the very existence of a religion pertaining to Africa. Perhaps Black Theology was dormant and covered in the mystery and taboo that pervades primitive religion the world over."¹⁴ He contends that just as God spoke to Moses by the burning bush, today He speaks to Africans in lightning and thunder and other natural phenomena. He writes:

On the horns of sacrificial beast is laid the altar of atonement (at-one-moment) with the creator....The flesh and blood of goat cleans and unites. Those who partake of the feast of redemption live forever and those who do not eat of the meat and wash in the blood of the lamb are outcasts and they are doomed.¹⁵

He therefore concludes:

We shall sing praises unto this God and tell the spirit of our forefathers who dwell with his courtyard to mediate for us. We shall commune with Him and His spirits beast and beer brewed from the grainary He has secured for us.¹⁶

For it is, after all, this God, and not the sectarian and selfish God of the white man, who is overflowing in love. Lediga believes, therefore, that it is the task of Black Theology to reveal anew this God to Africa.

I believe very strongly that to study African traditional religion in the task of Christian theologizing in Africa is a worthwhile exercise which African-Christian theologians should seriously think about. This is because African religions have much to offer to the shaping of authentic African theologies. Moreover, there are many Africans today who still value and follow traditional African religions. It is also only after a serious study that our knowledge of African religions will increase; and it is only after such that proper contextualization can take place. To avoid misunderstanding of terms and definitions, I suggest that the theology propounded by Agbeti and Lediga be called "Theology of Indigenous African Religion" for that is exactly what Agbeti and Lediga are concerned about. Such theology, though genuinely African, yet seems to lack the necessary Christian component, is a universal heritage rooted in the person of Christ and the biblical witness. In my proposed improvement of terminology in this paper, I have suggested the preferred use of the term Christian Theology in Africa which is authentically African and also genuinely Christian. Turning now to Black Theology in South Africa we shall see by contrasting it with Black Theology in North America that it succeeds in being both a Black and a Christian theology.

BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

There are three views about the origin of Black Theology in South Africa. Some on the continent believe that Black Theology was born in the year 1700 near the mouth of the Congo River. It was founded by a Congolese girl, Beatrice Kimpa Vita, a prophet, who claimed that she had been commanded to preach and teach after she had experienced death and had been resurrected. She taught that:

Christ appeared as a black man in Sao Salvador and that all his apostles were black. He was a Christ who identified himself with the Africans, who threw in his lot with that of the suffering, oppressed blacks as opposed to the white exploiters and oppressors.¹⁷

She insisted, therefore, that Christ would restore the Old Congolese Kingdom and establish a paradise on earth. Others claim that "African Theology began in 1960 during a meeting of theologians in Zaire, reflecting on the topic: 'Debate on African Theology?'"¹⁸ This particular seminar seems to have sparked a larger discussion on Black Theology in other parts of the continent, particularly in South Africa.

Finally, there are those who think that Black Theology reached South Africa through the influence of James Cone's tape in a seminar in 1971. The impact upon the participants was great. Mokegthi Motlhabi in an essay on Black Theology writes, "We feel...what Cone says in our bones."¹⁹

Whether this was the true origin or not, it is not until recently that the title "Black Theology" was imported from the United States, although it must be noticed that the content of American Black Theology was not imported with the title. Basil Moore defines Black Theology as a situational theology, the situation being the oppression of the black

man in South Africa. He writes, "It (Black Theology) begins with people—specific people, in a specific situation with specific problems to face." The black people in South Africa are facing the problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult and dehumanization.²⁰

Black Theology in South Africa is an attempt of the black man to overcome his slave mentality. The black man has been taught to think "white" and to believe that only what is associated with white is valuable. He has been accepted as human only in so far as he has rejected black ideals and accepted white ideals. Black Theology gives the black peoples their due recognition that the black man is somebody. In an attempt to find who they are, the South Africans are asking questions such as, "Was our black society and history and culture before the white man came so rotten and heathen that it had to be destroyed?"²¹ It is with this idea that they turn to scripture, tradition and classical doctrine to ask if it can say anything about black people in their situation.

Black Theology in South Africa is not the same as its counterpart in North America. The reason is obvious. The black American has lost the cultural context in which African Theology is taking place. We see that South Africa merges the two theological trends, Black and African Theology. The political bias in South Africa put the Africans, in many respects, in the same category as a black American in the United States. The main distinction is that the South African is in Africa, and this offers him "the substratum for an African Theology."²²

Some teachings of Black Theology in South Africa sound like those of the Black Theology of James Cone of the United States. But it must be stressed that, although they have some striking similarities, they are not identical. When we read the statements of Baartman and Buthelezi, we are led to believe that there is a great difference, at least in attitude, between these two theologies. Ernest Baartman for instance writes:

This is the difficult demand... "to love the white man." We cannot hate our fellow man. God created us in love that goes through bitterness, sweat and blood. He chose death. It is difficult to love whites. It is costly to love whites, yet the hatred must be rebuilt in love... the Gospel directs us all to pray that the day must never come when every black man will say, "I shall have nothing to do with the white man."²³

In the same tone, Manas Buthelezi writes:

What is it that is unique in the Christian Gospel?... It is the love of God in Jesus Christ that transforms strange neighbors into loving brothers. It is very often said that points of racial contacts are points of friction. What is unique about the gospel is that it changes points of contact into points of fellowships.²⁴

This attitude portrayed by Baartman and Buthelezi is in line with Jesus' teaching, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you" (Luke 6:27-28). On the contrary, Black Theology of North America is colour conscious in that the North American Black Theologians insist that blackness is the symbol which points to the dimensions of divine activity in America and that whiteness symbolizes the activity of deranged men and is satanic in nature. Hence, Cone writes:

In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being white theology and become Black Theology by denying whiteness as a proper form of human existence and affirming blackness as God's intention for humanity.²⁵

Thus Black Theology, in an apparent departure from the conventional interpretation of Christian teachings, holds that everything that assists the destruction of white racism is truly Christian, "the liberating deeds of God." And that the acts which "impede the struggle of black self-determination—Black Power—are anti-Christian, the work of Satan."²⁶

Another African scholar, Adam Small, comments that it is not the purpose of black South Africans to hate whites but rather to treat them as people. Then he adds that they wish to help the white people of South Africa "to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality."²⁷ Others like the late Steve Biko, though he is not a theologian, share similar values. Biko advocates a "peaceful integration of all the races in South Africa into a new, just and democratic socio-economic political system, symbolized by 'sitting at the same table' justly sharing the country's resources."²⁸ Included here is also Nelson Mandela, the vice-president of the African National Congress, for constantly and insistently preaching this message of love.

It must be mentioned, finally, that Black Theology in South Africa does not deal primarily with the colour of the skin, but with the entire value system symbolized by apartheid. It is also self-critical and open for dialogue.

Black Theology in South Africa may thus be regarded as a Christian theology. We get a picture of black Christians being persecuted as they witness to Jesus Christ, who frees all—black or white. One may hope that the present developments in South Africa will only serve to increase the focus of Black Theology in their reconciliation and love. As we move finally to Christian Theology done in Africa, we make suggestions for a theology that is both, like indigenous theology in Africa, authentically African because it takes seriously African Indigenous Religion, and, like Black Theology in South Africa, solidly Christian, because it begins with distinctively Christian affirmations.

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The Need

The foregoing discussion highlights the indisputable need for the emergence of a Christian Theology which is also African in the sense that it will meet the needs of the common African men and women wherever they are. Such a theology should be one which will interpret to the African people Jesus Christ, who is the only ground of unity for Christians. It should be a theology which will make them feel at home in the new faith. In other words, it should be a theology that will attempt to relate the gospel message to the various African situations in which they live and work.

Kwesi Dickson in an essay "Toward a *Theologia Africana*" quotes Donald Jacobs as saying:

Traditional Western Christian theology has some weaknesses even for western needs and often has not been seen to be relevant to African problems. Now we must come to the scriptures to discover God's answers to our problems here in our day.²⁹

Such a cry for a theology which is relevant to African needs can be heard from E. Bolaji Idowu. Concerning the church in Nigeria he comments that it has not developed a theology which bears the distinctive stamp of Nigerian thinking or meditation. "Theologically," he says, "she has been spoonfed by Europeans all along."³⁰ A theology which will minister to the African people "cannot be produced by a church which is imprisoned within foreign structures; such is forever impossible with a church whose spiritual and intellectual nourishment is a theology ready-made from abroad."³¹

The need for African theology was underscored again in 1969 when Pope Paul in his address to bishops declared:

The expression, that is the language and mode of manifesting the one Faith, may be manifold; hence it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith. From this point of view, a pluralism is not only legitimate but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is now possible, it is even favored by the church. The liturgical renewal is a living example of this. And in this sense you may and must have an African Christianity.³²

It is my conviction that for such a theology to retain its Christian uniqueness, it must start by confessing Jesus Christ as Lord who died and was raised for us, as its focal point of faith. It must do so in such a way that it will be "faithful to the inner thrust of the Christian revelation and also in harmony with the mentality of the person who formulates it."³³ We need to study the rich heritage of our African peoples recognizing that our people knew and worshiped God the Father.³⁴ And that it is the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ to which they need to be introduced. It is necessary that the African theologians interpret the gospel in such terms as are not only intelligible to African people but also suitable to their own temperaments.

It is evident that contemporary African Christians cannot continue to exist on an adapted theology. There is no real short cut; as Allmen puts it;

We must not fool ourselves; Western Theology is not Universal Theology. Whatever is universal about Western Theology is owed solely to the faith that has been professed in all times and in all places; and Western Theology has the duty to reckon with the possibility that others may express the faith in a manner that is just as valid and just as "universal," in categories that are proper to them.³⁵

African theologians must initiate a theology that is distinctively African, yet absolutely and truly Christian in its doctrine. A theology that will afford our people to worship God as Africans, that is:

In a way which is compatible with their own spiritual temperament, of singing to the glory of God in their own way, of praying to God and hearing His Holy Word in idiom which is clearly intelligible to them.³⁶

It is then, and only then, that we shall have a truly authentic African Christian the-

ology. A theology that will not be a copy of Western theology; nor will it be a syncretism of African traditional religions and Christian faith; neither will it be eclectic in nature. It will be a theology that will solely be grounded in an African understanding of scripture as the only true and infallible Word of God. How shall such a theology come into being? I will suggest that African theologians should be aware of such theological processes as syncretism and be able to avoid dangers inherent in a mishandling of these processes. I will discuss this briefly in the following section.

THE PROBLEMS OF SYNCRETISM IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

As I said earlier, the term "African Theology" is very debatable and many African theologians see and define it differently. Let me now mention a few more theologians who take a different line from that of Agbeti. Bengt Sundkler relates African theology with Christ when he says:

Theology in Africa has to interpret this Christ in terms that are relevant and essential to African existence....In Africa the same Christ, the King, proves Himself to be the life and the fullness with power to liberate from sickness and death and devil.³⁷

Such a theology, Sundkler contends, "must...start with fundamental facts of the African interpretation of existence and universe." At this point, he discusses what he calls "the links with the beginning, the links with the living dead...and the pastor as the mid-man."³⁸ Sundkler somehow fails to make a clear-cut distinction between the primacy of African religious experience on the one hand, and the supremacy of Christ on the other.

Harry Sawyer, makes the following comments:

There is a strong case for *Theologia Africana* which seeks to interpret Christ to the African in such a way that he feels at home in the new faith....Care must be taken to avoid syncretistic tendencies as well as a hollow theology for Africa. The answer is in the vigorous pursuit of systematic theology, based on a philosophical appraisal of the thought forms of the African people.³⁹

He expects this theology to be evangelistic and one which will erect bridges between the gospel and African thought forms.

M.E. Glasswell also sees African Theology to be a theology "which is conceived by Africans on the basis of African religious insights and emphases, and which serves the African understanding of the Christian faith and advances it."⁴⁰ This definition, and the rest of them that we have seen, have been said to fall under one danger—the danger of syncretism.⁴¹

Syncretism, according to *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, is "the mingling together of different philosophies or religions, resulting in hybrid forms of philosophy or of religion."⁴² In this context it would mean a theology which finds itself torn between traditional African beliefs and Christian faith. The result of such reconciliation of different beliefs and practices in religion is a mixture into one single theology. This has been regarded as a dangerous trend by some theologians.

The issue of syncretism in African (and other) theologies has been a topic of lively debate among theologians. It would appear that the castigation of syncretism emerges from the conservative premise that all tenets of Christian Theology are universally and eternally valid, and hence their contact with any "pagan" elements would only serve to adulterate them.

I would say that the question of syncretism cannot be so easily dismissed. It requires to be defined and understood in terms of its efficacy and limitations rather than "dangers." Syncretism is more ineffective than dangerous. It will suffice to give one example of how ineffective syncretism can be. In India syncretistic reconstructions of the best of Hindu and Muslim religions, as attempted by Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) and later on a broader scale by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), with the apparent noble intention of forging a unity between the two religions eventually failed.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

First, I would suggest that the term African Christian Theology is misleading. The term to me has its emphasis on "Africa" rather than on "Christian." Christian doctrines are held to be universal, eternal and non-negotiable. But the context of theology changes so that we can talk of Christian theology in America, India and so on. In this case, "Africa" defines the context of a theological reflection; it demarcates a culture in which Christian universal doctrines are taught. And as such, I would prefer the term Christian Theology in Africa to differentiate Christian Theology from other African Theologies.

Second, there is need for a serious dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religions. If Christianity is truly universal, in that it is identifiable with each and every human culture as it professes to be, then it should be able to penetrate the African culture. Christianity, then, cannot afford to reject such dialogue unless it is willing to forfeit its claim to catholicity.⁴³ Moreover, today's theology is committed to dialogue if it is to be relevant in the fast-changing society. Aylward W.F. Shorter devotes his book *African Christian Theology* to this idea of "dialogue." It is hoped that through questions and exchange with theologies of the past and of the present we shall perceive God's message for our contemporary situation, and it is for us to draw this message into a relationship of dialogue with our African culture.

Third, there is a "call for a new pattern of training of the (pastoral) ministry in Africa."⁴⁴ It is absolutely necessary that African ministers are trained in their own environment to provide authentic African ministry to African Christians. Signs of such a move are already evident.

The AMECEA Pastoral Institute and the African Inland Church Missionary College (both in Eldoret, Kenya) are encouraging responses to this call. The former gives renewal courses and updates both the clergy and the laity on the approaches to new theological trends in their mission. The aim of the latter college is to provide relevant, practical cross-cultural training for men and women who feel called by God to go out to proclaim the word of God as demanded by Jesus, "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all Mankind" (Mark 16:15).

It should, however, be noted that as long as the so-called "extreme rightist," missionaries from Europe and America, continue to manage and teach in African theological and pastoral institutions, there can be no real hope for the emergence of an authentic African pattern of Christian ministry. It is sad to note that these institutions are more like Western islands in Africa rather than like African institutions themselves. African graduates from such deculturized schools come out as "black Europeans" rather than as authentic Africans. In language, cultural and almost all other values they copy their white teachers. In Kenyan streets one may frequently witness scenes where these self-made Euro-African evangelists are heard preaching in English with a colleague interpreting for them in the local language; whereas both the preachers as well as the audience are quite fluent in the local language. It is in this light that the need for the emergence of authentic patterns of African pastoral ministry becomes all the more urgent.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined the three theological trends in Africa, namely, African Theology, Black Theology in South Africa and African Christian Theology. I have shown the differences among these trends. I have attempted to argue that many times these three trends are mistakenly lumped together in the general category of "African Theology" or "African Christian Theology." I have further sought to urge that a close study of these trends is necessary in order to understand and appreciate the emergence of a genuine Christian Theology in Africa towards which each of these trends contributes in its own special way.

I have further attempted to show the difficulties in defining African Theology and to delineate what African Theology is as understood by Agbeti and those who agree or even disagree with him. I have suggested that the term "African Theology" is not suitable to denote the entire process of theological reflection in Africa as Agbeti advocates and thus suggest that his theology would be better called "Theology of Indigenous African Religion." In reference to the various theologies in Africa, I have recommended the term "African Theologies."

I have also discussed Black Theology in South Africa and argued that it is not the same as its counterpart in North America. I have argued that Black Theology in South Africa is solidly Christian because it begins with distinctively Christian affirmation.

Finally, I have discussed African Christian Theology and the problem of syncretism. I have offered some suggestions on the growth of a Christian theology in Africa. I have also suggested that the term "African Christian Theology" may more suitably be replaced by the term "Christian Theology in Africa."

NOTES

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), p. 18.
2. For example the Kalenjin hymn, "Nyo, Jehovah, Toret Africa!" (God Bless Africa) in *Tienwogik Che Kilosune Jehova* (Kijabe: A.I.C., 1969), no. 245. There are various unpublished African hymns also embodying this theme.
3. John Mbiti, "Theology of the New World: Some Current Concerns of African Theology,"

The Expository Times, 87 (March 1976): 164.

4. John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 185.

5. *Ibid.*

6. J.N.K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd., 1990), p.10.

7. Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu: Kenya Evangel Publishing House, 1975), p. 55.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Diongwe Daidanso, "An African Christian Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 7.1 (April, 1983): 66.

10. J.K. Agbeti, *Theological Pitfalls*, p.54.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.

13. Basil Moore, ed., "What Is Black Theology?" in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), p. 42.

14. David J. Bosch, "Currents and Cross Currents in South African Black Theology," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 6 (1974): 10.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

18. Daidanso, "An African Christian Theology," p. 66.

19. Bosch, "Currents and Cross Currents," pp. 5, 6.

20. Moore, ed., "What Is Black Theology?," pp. 1, 6.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

22. Bosch, "Currents and Cross Currents," p. 13.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

24. *Ibid.*

25. James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1970), pp. 32, 33.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

27. Moore, ed. "What Is Black Theology?" p. 13.

28. Boniface K. Zabajongu, editorial comments on the article "Biko and Revolution in South Africa: A Liberation Theological Excursus," in *African Ecclesial Review*, 82 (February, 1990):1.

29. Donald R. Jacobs cited in Kwesi A. Dickson, "Towards a *Theologia Africana*," *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 201, 202.

30. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 22.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

32. E.W. Fashole-Luke, "The Quest for an African Christian Theology," *Ecumenical Review*, 27 (July, 1975): 262.

33. Daniel Von Allmen, "The Birth of Theology," *International Review of Mission*, 64 (January, 1975): 50.

34. There is a sincere yearning among Africans for a God whom they can worship as truly incarnated in their own religious systems, however uncompromising these systems may be to Western Christianity.

35. Allmen, "The Birth of Theology," p. 50.

36. Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, p. 11.

37. Bengt Sundkler, quoted in Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, p. 186.

38. Ibid.

39. Harry Sawyer, quoted in Fashole-Luke, "The Quest for an African Christian Theology," p. 263.

40. Rev. M.E. Glasswell, "Can There Be an African or Black Theology," *The Modern Churchman*, 18 (Summer, 1975): 165.

41. See Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, p. 175.

42. Alan Richardson, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 331.

43. Aylward W. Shorter, *African Christian Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), pp. 5, 6.

44. Harry Sawyer, *Creative Evangelism* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 157.

WESLEYAN RESOURCES FOR A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE POOR?

RANDY L. MADDOX

Recent years have witnessed epochal and unforeseeable changes in the political situation of the Northern hemisphere—the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fracturing of former Soviet satellites, and broad-scale rejection of nationalist communism. It is sometimes suggested that these changes totally discredit what has come to be called Liberation Theology. But while they do raise serious questions about some of the specific solutions proposed by certain liberation theologians, they have hardly eliminated the problems that spawned liberation theology in the first place. Indeed, there appears to be a widening gap at present between rich and poor in several nations, between developed (or overdeveloped!) nations and the developing nations, and between the culturally elite and the culturally marginalized.

For those of us in the Wesleyan theological traditions this situation sounds strangely reminiscent of the social context within which the original Methodist revival arose. Thus, there is good reason for asking whether there are resources in our tradition for relating the Good News of God's salvific love to this critical dimension of our current situation.¹ Other studies have focused attention on some of the characteristic Wesleyan convictions and practices that are very relevant to this issue.² The topic that I want to direct attention to deals not with such "content" of a Wesleyan theology, but with its method.

As liberation theologies found their voices among the world's poor and marginalized, their early questions often focused on specific doctrinal claims of the dominant Christian theological traditions. It did not take long though for the

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scope to enlarge and incorporate such questions as *who* does theology, *where*, and in *whose* interest. That is, they became convinced that there cannot be an adequate theological understanding of, or address to, the situation and needs of the poor or marginalized until theological reflection itself is done *with* and *by* these very folk. It is in this latter sense that I have titled this essay as the question of whether there are Wesleyan resources for a contemporary theology of the poor (i.e., a subjective genitive).

I. THE GROWING CRITIQUE OF CLASSIC ACADEMIC THEOLOGY

It does not take much reflection to recognize that the methodological questions being raised by those who are seeking to reformulate theology in the interests of the poor and marginalized, strike at the core of the current dominant model of serious theological activity in North Atlantic Christianity. This model developed with and is defined by the setting of the Western universities.³ The self-confessed goal of these universities was determining rationally-defensible and ordered knowledge, *for its own sake*. On such terms: 1) the favored forms of theological activity became apologetics (which seeks to provide a rational defense of Christian claims) and systematics (which seeks to provide a rational ordering of these claims); 2) Christian faith became identified with the "objective" findings of these academic disciplines; and 3) colleagues or opponents within the university (a fairly elite group!) became the primary dialogue partners and audience for theologians.

To capture the intensity of the reaction to this reigning model among those pursuing a theology of the poor and marginalized, let me quote from the final report adopted at the Second General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EAOTWT) (December 1986, Oaxtepec, Mexico):

Third World theology is theology as if people mattered. Its concern is not the neatness of a system but the liberation of the people. It is not elaborated in the academy but developed by the communities of the poor....Professional theologians are the communities' servants in interpreting events and in systematizing the communities' experience. Their fidelity and responsibility to the community are essential to the concept of theology....(This theology) calls for a very different language than that of the academy. There is no need for it to be apologetic....In sum we have learned to show more respect and concern for people than for systems and scientific theory.⁴

Implicit in this comparison with standard academic theology are alternatives to the three characteristics of this reigning model of theological activity that were noted above. Most obvious (to start in reverse order), the EAOTWT statement argues directly that the primary arena within which and for which theology should be done is not the academy but the Church—understood specifically as the community of all Christian disciples, with particular focus on those traditionally marginalized.⁵

The second alternative point, less obvious in this quote but clear in other liberation theology writings, is that the primary sense of Christian faith is identified as the implicit worldview that motivates Christians to faithful commitments of solidarity with the oppressed, not a set of abstract theological claims. Authentic theology grows

out of and reflects on such commitment.⁶ Involved here is a recovery of something like the early Christian distinction between the basic worldview (*habitus*) that motivates and guides individual believers' lives in the world and the pastoral activity of norming and forming this worldview in believers.⁷

This distinction relates directly to the third point, which is a shift of emphasis on what constitutes serious theological activity. We noted that the Western academic setting made systematic textbooks or sophisticated apologetics the standard form of theological activity. If the most primary context of theology is seen instead as the Christian community, and its task is the norming and forming of ordinary Christians' lives in the world, then serious theological activity will take different expressions. It will elevate to "first-order" those activities which serve most directly to form (or reform) the worldviews of believers; namely, such things as popular Bible commentaries, basic catechisms, hymns, liturgies and expositions of central elements of worship.⁸ It is no accident that we are seeing increased interest in such genres among liberation theologians.⁹

This should be enough to demonstrate that liberation theologians are calling for more than a minor revision of standard academic theology; they are calling for a fundamental change to an understanding and practice of theological activity that is more integrally related to the life of the Christian community. In making this call they join a number of other currents in recent reflection on theological methodology that are coalescing around the desire for transforming the defining model into a more truly "practical" theology.

II. DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF A "PRACTICAL" THEOLOGY

In another context I have surveyed the various voices calling for this recovery of a more "practical" discipline of theology and sketched the major characteristics that they desire in such a theology.¹⁰ It will be helpful to rehearse these characteristics here, drawing examples from those concerned with developing an authentic theology of the poor and marginalized.

A. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Unified

The first of the characteristics advocated for a recovered practical theology is that it overcome the bifurcation (and progressive isolation) of the various sciences that has come to typify the university theological curriculum. This bifurcation is a direct reflection of the separation of theological study and education from the daily life of the community of believers. As they have sought to bring theological reflection into the service of Christian life in the world, liberation theologians have found it necessary to violate such disciplinary boundaries, interweaving biblical and historical studies integrally with doctrinal reflection.¹¹

B. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Holistic

A second characteristic desired in a contemporary practical theology is that it be holistic. No one has urged this characteristic more strongly than liberation theologians, with their demand that theologians not isolate *orthodoxy* from *orthopraxy*. In

truly human praxis there is a constant dialectical connection between what we believe and what we do. As such, the disciplinary separation of doctrinal and ethical reflection in the academic theological curriculum must be rejected as a false (ideological!) move.¹²

Yet another dimension of a holistic theology is suggested by the recent renewed appreciation for the "character ethics" of Aristotle and the early Church. If human affections are not "mere feelings" but the motive power and orienting guides of authentic human praxis, then an integral part of a truly holistic (and practical) theology would be the nurturing and patterning of appropriate human affections (*orthoaffectus*). This point has gained emphasis among liberation theologians as they have rejected the dichotomy between spirituality and justice, reclaiming the spiritual (affectional) dimension of any theology committed to justice.¹³

C. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Make Praxis Primary

A third characteristic prevalent in the recent calls for a more practical theology is the affirmation of the primacy of praxis in theological activity. This is to contend, to begin with, that authentic theological activity is sparked by the needs and challenges of existing praxis, as contrasted with such factors as theoretical comprehensiveness and professional advancement.

At the same time, it is important to note that affirming the primacy of praxis does *not* imply a crude "pragmatism;" i.e., a reduction of theological decisions to the single criterion of "whatever will work." Nor does it necessarily entail that theology derives its norms from praxis.¹⁴ In short, it does not reject careful doctrinal reflection, drawing on biblical and historical resources. Rather, it requires that all such reflection be pursued to the point of determining the anthropological, soteriological and political dimensions of the doctrines under consideration.¹⁵

Likewise, an affirmation of the primacy of praxis would require that authentic theological reflection, however abstract, must always be related back to praxis through such "first-order" theological activities as constructing liturgies and shepherding congregations. In other words, the fundamental problem with the reigning academic model of theology is not that the latter involves abstract doctrinal reflection, but that (to use Alfred North Whitehead's term) it commits the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." It becomes consumed with abstract issues and theoretical precision, neglecting the praxis-related tasks that authentic theory is meant to serve.

D. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Inherently Transformative

The emphasis on the primacy of praxis leads directly to the fourth characteristic desired in a recovered practical theology: it should be inherently transformative. It should seek not merely to understand or explain Christian life, but to correct it. As Dermot Lane as put it,

The understanding of knowledge and truth operative in the primacy of praxis is one of transformation in contrast to the more traditional understanding of knowledge and truth as simply disclosure or correspondence or conformity or verification. These latter tend to maintain the status quo whereas an under-

standing of knowledge and truth as transformation challenges theology to go beyond the status quo.¹⁶

Obviously, this characteristic involves the claims of a practical theology. But it also relates to the form of theological activity. Systematics and apologetics can all-too-easily be taken as simply "explaining" Christian life. Such "first-order" activities as liturgies and Bible studies are more directly related to transforming incomplete or distorted Christian praxis.

E. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Communal

The fifth characteristic advocated for a contemporary practical theology has been a distinctive emphasis of those concerned to overcome the isolation from the community of faith that the professionalization of theology has fostered. They stress that theological reflection needs the participation of the breadth of persons involved in Christian praxis to preserve its vitality and wholeness.¹⁷ That is, it needs to be communal in its process.

Some specific aspects of this desired communal nature should be noted. First, the point at issue is not just that every individual has a right to participate in theological activity but that this activity is best done *in community*, by persons living together in faith. Second, there should be a particular concern to involve members of the community most often excluded by academic theology; i.e., the poor, oppressed or exploited. Third, while this emphasis specifically rejects the restriction of theological reflection to an elitist group of professional theologians, it does not exclude them. They too are a part of the community. However, as Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee have phrased it, it is crucial that "what the theologian does is *in the context of and with the people*, not *for the people* gathered as a community of faith."¹⁸ Finally, while it is essential to draw on the insights and wisdom of the entire Christian community, this should not be construed as reducing theological judgments to "majority rule."¹⁹ Criteria of authenticity for Christian life and belief would remain, and helping the community remain conscious of these may be the most important contribution of professional theologians to a communal practical theology.

F. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Contextual

Perhaps no characteristic desired in a recovered exercise of theology as a practical discipline has found wider contemporary consensus than the demand that it be contextual. It should not be devoted to the search for universal unchanging expressions of the Christian faith. Rather, it should undertake the demanding work of wrestling with both Christian revelation and particular socio-historical situations, seeking authentic context-sensitive embodiments of the Christian gospel. As Rebecca Chopp has shown, this characteristic is central to liberation theologies.²⁰

The theme of contextuality has received significant attention in recent years. In the process some clarifications have emerged. First, it has been argued that the context relevant to theology must be defined broadly, including the social and political dimensions of Christian life, rather than being reduced to individual human experience, as has been typical of Western liberal theology.²¹ Second, it has been stressed

that in its search for contextually-relevant theological expressions an authentically Christian practical theology must constantly guard against relativism.²²

G. Truly Practical Theological Activity Will Be Occasional

The final characteristic desired in a contemporary practical theology is that it be occasional; i.e., concerned more to address whatever pressing issues are arising in a specific community's life than to abide by some program for formulating an abstract theological System. There are few better examples of this conviction than the EAOTWT quote with which we began.

III. WESLEY'S MODEL OF THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

Such, then, are the characteristics being championed for a desired "practical" theology—an understanding and practice of theological activity that could more adequately constitute a theology of the poor and marginalized. One of the questions that many advocates of this agenda are asking is where can we find instructive models of such theological activity? The most promising place to look would be outside the time period and cultural location of the dominance of university theology; e.g. the Early Church, Eastern Orthodoxy and marginal Western traditions. I have suggested elsewhere that John Wesley might also be such a model!²³ Among the reasons for this suggestion was Wesley's heavy reliance on the Early Church—particularly many Greek theologians who were taken as authoritative for later Eastern Orthodoxy—as his prototypes for theological activity.²⁴

Wesley imbibed his interest in the Early Church from his Anglican setting. Seventeenth-century Anglicans had decided that the best way to preserve a *Via Media* between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was to take the pre-Constantinian Church as their norm. Among the implications of this was that they followed the Early Church in channeling theological activity into such expressions as a prayer-book, catechetical homilies, and brief articles of faith—rather than *summae*, encyclopaediae or Institutes. One result of this was that early Anglicanism experienced some less tension between the academy and the church than did contemporary continental Christianity. But tension there was, and when Wesley came face-to-face with this tension he decided that he could not remain in the relative security (and isolation) of the academic context while there was such pressing need for embracing and theologically shepherding the masses of ordinary Christians. Thus, like modern liberation theologians, Wesley took the primary arena of theological activity to be the community of believers, with a special focus on persons often excluded from the established church.²⁵

Wesley also shared the recognition of the distinction between the basic worldview (*habitus*) that motivates and guides individual believers' lives in the world and the pastoral activity of norming and forming this worldview. This is best seen in *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, where Wesley distinguished between genuine Christianity as a "principle in the soul" and genuine Christianity as a "system of doctrine" which describes Christian character and tells us how to attain it.²⁶

Finally, Wesley epitomized involvement in "first-order" theological activities like

those being appropriated by modern theologies of the poor and marginalized. Among these activities were: the theological editing of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and the *Book of Common Prayer*; the production of catechisms and catechetical sermons; the provision of carefully edited popular Bible study aids; the collection of guides for prayer and devotion; the publishing of spiritual biographies and autobiographies as models for imitation; the selection and editing of hymns for Methodist worship; the numerous letters of pastoral advice; the theological conferences with his preachers; and essays, open letters and tracts addressing issues that arose within the Methodist movement.

With these general commonalities in mind, let us consider how well Wesley's theological activity may have approximated the characteristics desired in a contemporary recovered "practical" discipline of theology.

A. Wesley's Theological Activity Was Unified

Wesley largely antedated the growing separation of the sciences in the theological curriculum. Accordingly, he showed little hesitance in ranging among the areas of Scripture, history of Christianity, church discipline and doctrinal theology. While he recognized different genres of theological writing (controversial, practical, etc.) he assumed an overall unity of the theological task. This was particularly the case as he placed theological reflection in service to ministry. To be sure, Wesley's was a naive, unified theology, since he never faced the challenge of the later divisions. Yet, his example might still bear consideration as post-modern theologians seek a "second naïveté" (Paul Ricoeur) that reunifies the various theological domains.

B. Wesley's Theological Activity Was Holistic

It is also easy to demonstrate that Wesley shared the concern that orthodoxy not be separated from orthopraxy. This is the point at issue in his well-known claim that "right opinion" is a "slender part of religion." He was not intending to dismiss right opinion, but to insist that it was of no value unless it finds embodiment in Christian praxis.²⁷ The connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy is also reflected in the typical agenda of Wesley's conferences with his preachers, which dealt not only with doctrine, but with discipline and practice as well.²⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that some liberation theologians have found Wesley's example on this point suggestive, making allowance for the fact that he shared his age's blindness to the structural aspects of sin and Christian praxis.²⁹

If we turn to the broader conception of a holistic theology, which incorporates the insights of "character ethics," there is so much warrant in Wesley that he has frequently been touted as an exemplar by advocates of this general theme.³⁰

C. Wesley's Theological Activity Reflected the Primacy of Praxis

This brings us to the affirmation of the primacy of praxis in theological method. Such primacy assumes, to begin with, that it is the needs and challenges of existing praxis that spark authentic theological activity. Even a cursory examination verifies that the stimulus of most of Wesley's theological endeavors was the struggle to meet the needs of, and address the controversies within, his revival movement.

The primacy of praxis also entails that theological reflection must always be related back to praxis through "first-order" theological activities. The earlier listing of the various forms of Wesley's theological activity should demonstrate his appreciation for such "first-order" activities.

What the primacy of praxis does *not* imply is a crude "pragmatism" or the neglect of careful doctrinal reflection. Wesley surely did not avoid doctrinal reflection. Indeed, at one time or another, he touched on every major area of Christian doctrine. Moreover, he did not limit himself to doctrines whose implications for Christian life (or evangelism) were immediately evident. He found it necessary to take up some quite technical debates, such as the question of whether Christ's death was the *formal* or *meritorious* cause of justifying faith.³¹ He also dealt with such speculative issues as the nature of animals in Heaven,³² the nature of the torments in Hell,³³ and how God will deal with those who have not heard of Christ.³⁴ But, what most characterized Wesley's doctrinal reflection was that it always highlighted the anthropological and soteriological implications of the doctrine under consideration, no matter how technical or speculative it might be.³⁵ As such, it is misleading to characterize Wesley as "a practical rather than speculative thinker."³⁶ Much more appropriate would be the valuation of him as a self-conscious, practical theologian, undertaking careful doctrinal reflection in response to the stimulus of praxis and in service to primary theological activities.

D. Wesley's Theology Was Inherently Transformative

The next characteristic desired in a recovered practical theology is that it should seek not merely to understand or explicate Christian life, but to correct it. Obviously, this assumes that humans (and human societies) are not spiritually whole, and that theology's goal is not to make them comfortable with their faults but to reform them. Wesley shared this conviction; as evidenced by such claims as that, while Calvinists merely aim to make Calvinists, he is trying to make Christians!³⁷ As we have seen, he also concentrated his theological activity in genres that are most likely to have character-forming and—transforming impact.

E. Was Wesley's Theological Activity Communal?

What about the suggestion that a practical theology be communal in its process? Wesley's precedent in this regard must be considered ambiguous. On the one hand, he valiantly sought to bridge the gap between professional theology and his minimally-educated followers by providing abridged and simplified editions of materials he judged appropriate. Likewise, he created the communal setting of the conference for discussing Methodist belief and practice with his preachers. On the other hand, despite his frequent claim that he desired to stimulate thinking rather than indoctrinating, Wesley was hardly a strong advocate of giving the "people" a voice in theological decisions. His primary goal was to provide his lay pastors and other followers with an appropriate theological formation, not to solicit from them new theological insights or perspectives.³⁸

While this role for the "people" leaves much to be desired, one must admit that

Wesley avoided a simple "majority rule" approach to theological decision-making and fulfilled the role of holding the community accountable to criteria of theological authenticity. Likewise, the truth is that Wesley did actually draw on his interactions with his people for doctrinal judgments (on issues such as the connection between conversion and assurance, or the possibility of entire sanctification), though the people themselves functioned more as test cases than as valued interpreters.

F. Wesley's Theological Activity Was Contextual

There is a growing recognition among Wesley scholars of how contextual his doctrinal reflection was, and of how this fact helps alleviate some seeming inconsistencies in his convictions. Good examples would include: Allan Coppedge's study of the contextuality of Wesley's responses to the Calvinist Methodists and their affirmation of predestination; Robert Fraser's argument that Wesley nuanced his comments on sanctification relative to his audience; Mark Horst's analysis of Wesley's situational utilization of two differing emphases on repentance; John H. Tyson's review of the contextual dynamics of Wesley's interrelation of law and Gospel; and John R. Tyson's examination of the contextual variation of Wesley's definition of sin.³⁹ To be sure, this is a different dimension of contextuality than relating the Gospel to differing socio-historical contexts, but the general precedent remains.

The crucial point about the contextual dynamics of Wesley's theological reflection is that it seldom degenerates into relativism. Rather, there is a reasonable consistency between the sundry contextual variations that appears to reflect a basic orienting concern which guided Wesley's various contextual theological judgments.⁴⁰

G. Wesley's Theological Activity Was Occasional

We come finally to the "occasional" nature of a truly practical theology. Perhaps the most relevant expressions of Wesley's theological activity in this regard are his various open letters, appeals, tracts and essays published to explain and defend his theological positions. One might suppose that these are exceptions to the characterization of Wesley as a practical theologian. After all, it is usually to these works that Wesley scholars turn to defend him in the academy as a theologian.⁴¹ However, these works too are best accounted for under the model of theology as a practical discipline, because they are ideal examples of occasional praxis-related theological reflection, spawned by the controversies and needs of his Methodist people.

IV. RENEWING WESLEY'S MODEL IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

So what might twentieth-century descendants of that original Methodist movement conclude from the discussion so far? One possibility would be to rethink Wesley's status as a theologian. It has become almost obligatory for anyone writing on Wesley's theology to begin with an apology that he was not a "systematic theologian." The implication usually derived from this is that Wesley's model of theological activity was second-rate, or even third-rate!⁴² In light of the growing questions about the standard against which he was being judged and found wanting, a more positive estimation of Wesley would seem possible.

But why even undertake such a reevaluation? Several possible motives come to mind: a desire for historical accuracy, the hope of renewing appreciation for doctrinal reflection in Methodist circles, or even a partisan ambition to reverse the tables and champion Wesley (or Methodism) against those traditions in which systematic theology has been more common. However one assesses these possibilities, I would suggest that something more fundamental is at stake.

We face a dire need for reintegrating the practice of theological reflection and activity into the life of the community of believers if we are to foster authentically Christian responses to the urgent problems of our times—including the problems of poverty and economic injustice. Recovered awareness of earlier approximations to such integration would provide both traditional warrant and instructive prototypes for addressing this present need. In other words, a renewed appreciation for Wesley's model of theological activity may be one of the contributions that our tradition can make to the current quest for a theology of the poor and marginalized, for it might encourage contemporary analogues.

But if it is to have this effect, then it surely must begin at home! In their concern to demonstrate that their theology was truly Protestant, Methodists largely abandoned Wesley's more "practical" Anglican style and forms of theological activity in the early nineteenth century, appropriating the scholastic style typical of continental Protestant theology. A striking symbol of this move was the publication of the first "compend" of Wesley's theology in 1825—to provide an abstract, comprehensive and systematically organized survey of his theological convictions.⁴³ This move distanced theological reflection from praxis at both ends: from the situation and needs of the community of believers which should spark authentic reflection, and from "first-order" theological activities that address this community.

Thus, if we in the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions should seriously wish to commend Wesley's model of theological activity to the broader contemporary Christian community, then we must start by taking it more seriously ourselves. We must immerse ourselves in the life of the household of believers—including particularly those usually excluded from influence—as deeply as we have been immersed in the academy. And we must devote more of our attention to the primal level of theological work, which is comprised by those activities which most directly form and reform Christian life in the world: i.e., constructing liturgies, designing worship, expositing the creed, preparing catechisms, and so on.⁴⁴

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at the Ninth Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies (July-August 1992), which had the theme "Good News for the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition?"

2. See especially: *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Theodore H. Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); and Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

3. The dynamics of this development and its effects on the previous practice of theology as a practical discipline are traced in Randy L. Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650-672.
4. *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*, ed. K.C. Abraham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), pp. 200-201.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. ix, 198.
6. Perhaps the clearest expression of this distinction is in Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976). Segundo argues that theology must be seen as the "second step," reflecting on acts of commitment (75ff). He then notes that faith or ideologies are prior to commitment (97-102). The idea of a worldview would appear to capture what he means by "faith" and "ideology" together. See also Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 9-14.
7. The connection to the Early Church is noted explicitly in Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), p. 4; and Boff & Boff, *Liberation Theology*, p. 16. See also the analysis of early Christian understandings of theology in Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), pp. 31-37.
8. Cf. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), pp. 11-21. They make a distinction between three levels of liberation theology: professional, pastoral and popular. They stress the primacy of such "first-order" activities for popular liberation theology, which deals with the broad Christian population. They do not make as clear as others would the primacy of this level of theology.
9. E.g. Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979); Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, 4 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976-82); and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Sacraments Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979). On the importance of popular biblical commentaries see also Abraham, *Third World Theologies*, pp. 72-73.
10. Maddox, "Recovering Theology as a Practical Discipline."
11. To quote from the Asian report in *Third World Theologies*, "Theological methodologies are ways of doing theology on biblical grounds and sources, in relation to historical contexts, that is, in commitment or response to the struggles of oppressed peoples in the Third World" (p. 19).
12. See especially Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), pp. 92-94.
13. Note particularly: Segundo Galilea, *The Way of Living Faith: A Spirituality of Liberation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988); Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984); and Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988).
14. On this often misunderstood point, see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), esp. pp. 190, 200. See also José Miguez Bonino, "Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis," in *The Vocation of the Theologian*, ed. T.W. Jennings (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), pp. 37-48.
15. For some good examples of such doctrinal reflection, see Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989); and the discussion of the practical nature of the Christian idea of God in Johann-Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), pp. 51, 67.
16. Dermot Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation* (New York: Paulist, 1984), p. 67. See also Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), p. 151.

17. See especially Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee, eds. *Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).
18. Amirtham and Pobee, "Introduction," *Theology by the People*, p. 7. See also Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, "Introduction," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 1-15.
19. See the cautionary words in Rebecca Chopp, "Practical Theology and Liberation," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), pp. 120-138; here, p. 124.
20. Chopp, *Praxis of Suffering*, p. 140: "(for liberation theologians) theology is known as a practical activity, characterized by its concreteness in dealing with particular events, stories, and witnesses rather than limiting its role to the analysis of general concepts of existence and tradition."
21. For stinging critiques of the Western liberal theological project see Amirtham and Pobee, *Theology by the People*; Chopp, "Practical Theology and Liberation"; and Thistlethwaite and Engel, *Lift Every Voice*.
22. For particularly helpful discussion of this aspect of contextualization, see Robert Brown, "What is Contextual Theology?" in *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*, ed. Letty Russell (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), pp. 80-94; and Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).
23. Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley—Practical Theologian?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122-147.
24. On this point see Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45 (1990): 29-53.
25. Note the argument that Wesley's decision to be a "folk theologian" was influenced by the emerging gap between upper and lower classes in the eighteenth century in Robert Wilson & Steve Harper, *Faith and Form: A Unity of Theology and Polity in the United Methodist Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 19.
26. "Plain Account of Genuine Christianity," §II.1, in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford, 1964), p. 188.
27. For more on this see Randy L. Maddox, "Opinion, Religion and 'Catholic Spirit': John Wesley on Theological Integrity," *Asbury Theological Journal* 47 (1992): 63-87.
28. See *Minutes* (25 June 1744), in *John Wesley*, p. 136.
29. Cf. *Sanctification and Liberation: Abingdon Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Theodore H. Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).
30. E.g. Gregory Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989); Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975), Chap. 5; Mark Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith in John Wesley's Thought" (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1985), esp. p. 131; Henry Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), pp. 195-196; and Richard Steele, "'Gracious Affections' and 'True Virtue' in the Experimental Theologies of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley" (Marquette University Ph.D. thesis, 1990), pp. 307 fn54, 444ff.
31. See the summary of the issues involved in Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Kenneth Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), pp. 11-38; here, p. 25.
32. Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §III.3-4, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984ff), 2:446-447 (hereafter referred to as *Works*).
33. Sermon 73, "Of Hell," *Works*, 3:31-44.

34. Sermon 91, "On Charity," §II.3, *Works*, 3:295-296; Sermon 106, "On Faith," §I.4, *Works*, 3:494; and Sermon 130, "On Living Without God," §14, *Works*, 4:174. See also Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27.1 (1992).

35. Note the consistent style in his "doctrinal" sermons of defining and (if necessary) defending the doctrine, and then highlighting the praxis dimensions of the doctrine. E.g., Sermon 67, "On Divine Providence," §27, *Works*, 2:548; Sermon 72, "On Evil Angels," §III, *Works*, 3:27; and the whole of Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being" (*Works*, 4:61ff), where his description of God's attributes culminates in a description of true religion as "gratitude and benevolence" (§16 [p. 66]).

36. As in Frederick Maser, "The Unknown John Wesley," *Drew Gateway* 49.2 (1978): 1-28, p. 9.

37. Letter to Mrs. Woodhouse (30 July 1773), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 6:34.

38. For one example of his claim to want to stimulate free thought rather than providing all the answers, see the Preface of his *OT Notes*, §17, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 14:252. At the same time, it is clear that he expected only *motivation* from his meetings with his people, while he would provide them with *information*. As he put it in his *Journal* (16 Feb. 1760), they needed *light* while he needed *heat* (*Works* 21:240).

39. Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987); Robert Fraser, "Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism" (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), pp. 60-61; Horst, "Christian Understanding," pp. 80-91; John H. Tyson, "The Interdependence of Law and Grace in John Wesley's Teaching and Preaching" (University of Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, 1991); and John R. Tyson, "Sin, Self, and Society: John Wesley's Hamartiology Reconsidered," *Asbury Theological Journal* 44 (Spring 1989): 77-89, esp. pp. 80-82.

40. I have tried to develop this case in some detail in *John Wesley: Practical Theologian of Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

41. E.g. Robert Casto, "Exegetical Method in John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*: A Description of His Approach, Uses of Sources, and Practice" (Duke University Ph.D. thesis, 1977), p. 2; and Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 104ff.

42. E.g. Rupert Davies, "The People Called Methodists: 1. Our Doctrines," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol. I, ed. R. Davies (London: Epworth, 1965), p. 147.

43. *Wesleyana: A Selection of the Most Important Passages in the Writings of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Arranged to form a Complete Body of Divinity* (London: W. Booth, 1825). This compend was apparently prepared by William Carpenter. On its purpose, see the Preface, pp. iii-iv. It was reprinted several times in the nineteenth century. Its place has been taken more recently by Robert Burtner & Robert Chiles, *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954; [1982]).

44. A good example of the style of work that I am suggesting is the trilogy by Theodore W. Jennings, Jr.: *Life as Worship: Prayer and Praise in Jesus' Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982); *The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988); and *Loyalty to God: The Apostle's Creed in Life and Liturgy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).

THE MOTIF OF REAL CHRISTIANITY IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN WESLEY

KENNETH J. COLLINS

In 1963, on the 225th anniversary of John Wesley's Aldersgate experience—an experience which many scholars mark as the Oxford don's evangelical conversion—Albert Outler made the unsettling and largely unsupported claim that “Aldersgate was not the time when John Wesley became a ‘real Christian.’”¹ Likewise, and more recently, Theodore Jennings maintained not only that Wesley was a Christian prior to May 24, 1738, but that “nothing [had] changed with Aldersgate.”² And Randy Maddox, for his part, repeatedly decried the “reigning” standard interpretation of Aldersgate which has contended, among other things, that Wesley was converted in 1738 “from a pre-Christian moralist into a true Christian believer.”³

What is truly remarkable about the preceding generalizations, beyond their forcefulness, is that they have not been substantiated by a cautious, reasoned and historically sensitive examination of the motif of “real Christianity” in the writings of John Wesley—a motif which is integral to any assessment of the spiritual trajectory of this eighteenth-century leader. Furthermore, not one of these scholars has considered, in any depth, Wesley's conception of “the faith of a servant” and the whole question of Christian assurance as they relate to this broader motif. Indeed, the general, though erroneous, view among many Methodist scholars today seems to be that Wesley either abandoned the motif of real Christianity as he developed the distinction of the faith of a servant or else he reduced this motif so greatly as to include the latter.⁴ In contrast to these assumptions, and also in order to offer an alternative perspective for historians

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to consider, this present essay will track all of these themes just cited (real Christianity, the faith of a servant, and Christian assurance) which fed into John Wesley's *mature* conception of the Christian faith. Moreover, in order to display the subtle shifts of Wesley's thought over time, the essay will be divided into three major periods. Interestingly, what will emerge from such labor should prove troubling to many popular beliefs, but it will, no doubt, further the debate among contemporary Methodist historians.

I. SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATIONS IN THE THEME OF REAL CHRISTIANITY: 1725 - 1747

Even as a young man, John Wesley realized that great national churches, like the Church of England, though they insured the numerical predominance of a particular version of the faith, often left nominal Christianity in their wake. Indeed, for many in the eighteenth century, to be an English person was to be a Christian. However, as early as 1725, the year in which Wesley clearly saw the end or goal of religion which is holiness, he challenged such glib assumptions among his compatriots and entreated John Griffiths, for example, "to let me have the pleasure of making him a whole Christian, to which I knew he was at least half persuaded already."⁵ And a few years later, in an important letter to his father, Samuel, the young son complained that the bane of piety is "the company of good sort of men, lukewarm Christians (as they are called), persons that have a great concern for, but no sense of, religion."⁶ Not surprisingly, during the year 1738 in which Wesley encountered a gracious and redemptive God, he exclaimed: "Oh how high and holy a thing Christianity is, and how widely distant from that (I know not what) is so called...."⁷

So concerned was John Wesley with the idea of being a real Christian in his early years that he noted in retrospect in 1739 that his reason for undertaking the arduous work of a missionary in Georgia as well as his subsequent visit to the Moravians at Herrnhut was his "desire to be a Christian."⁸ But it was not until two years later that the Methodist leader focused his thoughts on this topic by producing the sermon *The Almost Christian* which he delivered before the venerable of Oxford at St. Mary's church. However, as will be apparent shortly, much of what Wesley had to say about "altogether Christians" in this homily was later modified. Nevertheless, the theme of real Christianity remained a vital one for him during this period as demonstrated by its repeated emergence in his writings during the 1740s. In 1747, for example, Wesley cautioned against "that abundance of those who bear the name of Christians [who] put a part of religion for the whole—generally some outward work or form of worship."⁹

A. The Faith of a Servant

In order to discern clearly the subtle (and not so subtle) modifications which Wesley made in his understanding of real or true Christianity, it is necessary to consider this motif against the backdrop of what Wesley called "the faith of a servant" and also in terms of his doctrine of assurance. Indeed, the reigning view in Wesley Studies today is that the Oxford don basically put aside the language of real

Christianity once he began to use the language of the faith of a servant.¹⁰ However, this is a judgment which cannot be sustained by an appeal to the primary sources as this present essay will demonstrate.

But first of all it must be asked, how did Wesley define the faith of a servant during the years 1725 to 1747? Remarkably, the exact phrase "the faith of a servant" is not really developed during this initial period. Nevertheless, since Wesley later linked this phrase with a key distinction which he did indeed make at this time, namely, the distinction between the spirit of bondage and the spirit of adoption, this period does, after all, illuminate many of the characteristics of the faith of a servant. In particular, the identification of the "faith of a servant" with the "spirit of bondage" is revealed in the sermon, *The Discoveries of Faith*, produced in 1788. In it, Wesley observes:

Exhort him to press on by all possible means, till he passes 'from faith to faith'; from the faith of a *servant* to the faith of a *son*; from the *spirit of bondage* unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love.¹¹

What then are the traits of the spirit of bondage displayed in the homily *The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption* and which were later identified with the faith of a servant? Those under a spirit of bondage, Wesley argues, feel sorrow and remorse; they fear death, the devil, and humanity; they desire to break free from the chains of sin, but cannot, and their cry of despair is typified by the Pauline expression: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"¹² In fact, in this sermon Wesley specifically identifies "this whole struggle of one who is 'under the law' " with the spirit of bondage and with the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the seventh chapter of *Romans*.¹³ More to the point, these traits just cited are hardly the attributes which constitute real Christianity according to John Wesley since he defined true Christians, at the very least, as those who believe in Christ such that "sin hath no more dominion over him."¹⁴

B. The Doctrine of Assurance

In Wesley Studies today, it is well known that when John Wesley was under the strong influence of the English Moravians, he closely identified justifying faith with full assurance.¹⁵ However, by the summer of 1740, he began to realize that there are both degrees of faith and degrees of assurance and that a child of God may exercise justifying faith which is mixed with both doubt and fear.¹⁶ Nevertheless, a second issue, which can be differentiated from the one just cited, concerns the question of whether Wesley ever lowered or abandoned the standard of real Christianity in light of his newly articulated distinctions. This time, however, the question will be considered not with respect to the spirit of bondage, and its implications, but with respect to the whole matter of assurance.

On the one hand, the initial answer to this question must be "yes" since Wesley obviously modified his earlier erroneous views in two key respects: First of all, the English Moravians, who exercised a strong, early influence on Wesley, propounded a view of redemption which, according to Heitzenrater, "essentially equated conversion with perfection."¹⁷ In time, however, Wesley distinguished freedom from sin in terms

of its guilt, power and being, and thereby repudiated the Moravian doctrine on this score.¹⁸ Simply put, for Wesley, redemption or initial sanctification entailed freedom from the guilt (justification) and power (regeneration) of sin, but not freedom from its being (entire sanctification). In other words, the carnal nature or inbred sin remained even in the children of God.

Second, and more importantly for the task at hand, Wesley likewise modified his earlier view which had associated full assurance with justifying faith as just noted above. Indeed, a little more than a year after he began the practice of field preaching, Wesley conceived the doctrine of justification by faith no longer in terms of full assurance but in terms of a *measure* of assurance. But is this qualified assurance, occasionally marked by doubt and fear, necessary for redemption, for what constitutes real Christianity? Here the picture becomes somewhat complicated. For example, at the first Methodist conference in 1744 it was affirmed by all present that "all *true Christians* have such a faith as implies an assurance of God's love."¹⁹ However, by the time of the next conference in 1745 the question was reconsidered and a slightly different answer was offered. Wesley wrote:

Q. Is a sense of God's pardoning love absolutely necessary to our being in his favor? Or may there be some exempt cases?

A. We dare not say there are not.

Q. Is it necessary to inward and outward holiness?

A. We incline to think it is.²⁰

In a similar vein, the conference Minutes of 1747 noted that there may be exempt cases, that justifying faith may not always be accompanied by a measure of assurance. But the conference then offered this caution: "It is dangerous to ground a general doctrine on a few particular experiments."²¹ In addition, although this conference, like the one in 1745, recognized that there are, after all, exceptional cases, it nevertheless clarified its meaning and affirmed: "But this we know, if Christ is not revealed in them [by the Holy Spirit], they are not yet Christian believers."²² In fact, in 1747, Wesley, for the most part, still identified the assurance that one's sins are forgiven as a vital ingredient of the proper Christian faith. Thus, for example, in a revealing letter to his brother Charles, written a month after the 1747 conference, John illustrates his doctrine of assurance by pointing out: "(1) that there is such an explicit assurance; (2) that it is the common privilege of *real Christians*; (3) that it is *the proper Christian faith*, which purifieth the heart and overcometh the world."²³ In other words, the observation that there are exceptions to Wesley's normal association of justification by faith and a measure of assurance is accurate; however, that he identified this faith which lacks the witness of the Spirit with real, proper Christianity is not. The distinction is important.

II. THE THEME OF REAL CHRISTIANITY DEVELOPED: 1748 - 1770

Historically speaking, John Wesley's preoccupation with the theme of real Christianity was undoubtedly reminiscent of the work of Johann Arndt and of such

early German pietists as Spener and Francke. Arndt, for instance, had highlighted the themes of personal reform, the repudiation of stale intellectualism, criticism of doctrinal provincialism, and the importance of sanctification more than a century prior to Wesley in his *Wahres Christenthum* (True Christianity), a work which the latter saw fit to include in the first volume of his *Christian Library* in 1749.²⁴ In particular, observe the opening lines of Arndt's work and the emphasis which they place on the practice of the Christian life.

Dear Christian reader, that the holy Gospel is subjected, in our time, to great and shameful abuse is fully proved by the impenitent life of the ungodly who praise Christ and his word with their mouths and yet lead an unchristian life that is like that of persons who dwell in heathendom, not in the Christian world.²⁵

In a similar fashion, Wesley cautioned against nominal or "mouth Christians" and was not above sarcasm as evidenced by the following account which appeared in his journal during the year 1755:

One spent the evening with us who is accounted both a sensible and a religious man. What a proof of the Fall! Even with all the advantages of a liberal education, this person, I will be bold to say, knows just as much of heart religion, of scriptural Christianity, the religion of love, as a child three years old of algebra.²⁶

Nevertheless, the major emphasis of Wesley during this middle period as he developed the motif of real Christianity was his insistence, to the consternation of some of his Anglican peers, that a Christian "while he keepeth himself...doth not commit sin."²⁷ Accordingly, in his sermons *The Marks of the New Birth* and *The Great Privilege of Those Who are Born of God*, both produced in 1748, Wesley refused to depreciate this standard of teaching. In the former piece, for instance, he reasoned that "an immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God...is power over sin: power over outward sin of every kind...." And in the latter sermon he declared: "But whosoever is born of God, while he abideth in faith and love and in the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving, not only doth not, but cannot thus commit sin...he cannot voluntarily transgress any command of God."²⁹

Two other emphases are also of interest during this period: First, during the decade of the 1760s Wesley, on two occasions, reflected back on his Oxford days and stated not only that the very design of the Oxford Methodists was "to forward each other in true, scriptural Christianity,"³⁰ but he also revealed, to use his own words, that "when I was at Oxford, I never was afraid of any but the almost Christians."³¹ Second, the distinction between nominal and real Christianity was beginning to take on a paradigmatic flavor such that Wesley now began to speak not only of half Christians but also of half Methodists! Note his comments to Lady Maxwell in 1764:

And I entreat you do not regard the half-Methodists—If we must use the name. Do not mind them who endeavour to hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other. I want you to be all a Christian....³²

A. The Faith of a Servant

Interestingly enough, it was not until this second period that the exact phrase "the faith of a servant" was explored in any significant detail. In 1754, for example, in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley defines the faith of a servant in terms of the spirit of bondage and fear that cleaved to the old covenant.³³ Elsewhere he associates the phrase with those who "fear God and worketh righteousness" as in his commentary on Acts 10:35.³⁴ However, this latter usage makes clear that the faith of a servant was conceived in a very general way by the English leader and included all those believers of *whatever religious tradition* who endeavored to worship God according to the light and grace which they had. Wesley explains:

But in every nation he that *feareth God and worketh righteousness...is accepted of him*—through Christ, though he knows him not.... He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not.³⁵

Continuing this line of thought, since those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted even though they may be ignorant of Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and the sacraments, this demonstrates that such acceptance is not indicative of the real, proper Christian faith, as is often supposed, but instead is an important implication of Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace which is both universal and Christologically based.³⁶ In fact, in this same commentary, but this time on the book of Romans, Wesley cautions his readers and affirms that "real Christians have not the spirit of bondage."³⁷ Moreover, his letters to Ann Bolton in 1768 and in 1770 illustrate the notion that the faith of a servant, though earnest and virtuous, falls far short of the promises which pertain to all real Christians. "I am glad you are still *waiting for the kingdom of God*," Wesley writes to Ms. Bolton in 1770, "although as yet you are rather in the state of a servant than of a child."³⁸ In short, the acceptance of those who fear God and work righteousness must not be confused with the status of the proper Christian faith.

B. The Doctrine of Assurance

In his correspondence to Richard Tompson during 1755, Wesley clarified his doctrine of assurance in two key respects: on the one hand, he argued that there is an intermediate state between a child of the devil and a child of God and that those who are not assured that their sins are forgiven may have a degree of faith and, therefore, may be admitted to the Lord's Supper.³⁹ On the other hand, Wesley continued to emphasize the importance of assurance for the Christian faith and asserted: "But still I believe *the proper Christian faith* which purifies the heart implies such a conviction."⁴⁰ Indeed, in this same piece Wesley pointed out with regard to assurance that "the whole Christian Church in the first centuries enjoyed it."⁴¹ And again he exclaimed: "If that knowledge were destroyed, or wholly *withdrawn*, I could not then say, I had Christian faith."⁴²

Moreover, Wesley's subsequent letters to Richard Tompson the next year contained even further clarification on this topic and one significant, though seldom understood, exception. Concerning this last point, Wesley admitted to Mr. Tompson

on February 18, 1756, in a way reminiscent of the 1747 conference, that one may be in a state of justification and yet lack assurance. Thus, when the Oxford don posed the question in his letter, "Can a man who has not a clear assurance that his sins are forgiven be in a state of justification?" he replied, "I believe there are some instances of it."⁴³ However, it was not until much later that Wesley indicated *the reason* for this exception. In a letter to Dr. Rutherford in 1768, Wesley elaborates:

Yet I do not affirm there are no exceptions to this general rule [of the association of a measure of assurance with justification]. Possibly some may be in the favour of God, and yet go mourning all the day long. But I believe this is usually owing either to disorder of body or ignorance of the gospel promises.⁴⁴

Two issues need to be separated here which are often confused by contemporary scholars. On the one hand, the elderly Wesley still did not identify nor confuse the faith of a servant, and its measure of acceptance, with the assurance that one's sins are forgiven; since being under "the spirit of bondage," a servant, properly speaking, lacks justifying faith. On the other hand, the Methodist leader recognized that in some exceptional cases those who are justified and regenerated (and hence children of God) may lack an assurance that their sins are forgiven due to either ignorance or bodily disorder.⁴⁵ However, in this second instance, since these believers are justified, they are more suitably referred to not as servants, but as the sons and daughters of God. Put another way, all servants lack assurance and are under a spirit of bondage, but not all who lack assurance are thereby servants, nor are they all under a spirit of bondage. There are, after all, exempt cases. Consequently, Wesley's mature designation of his own faith as that of a servant prior to May 1738 is much more revealing than many scholars have imagined.

III. THE MOTIF OF REAL CHRISTIANITY RESPLENDENT: 1771-1791

It is well known among Methodist historians that when John Wesley was en route to Georgia aboard the *Simmonds* the powerful Atlantic storms revealed to the young aspiring missionary his fear of death. What has been less noticed, however, is that it was precisely the *mature* Wesley who continued to identify fearlessness in the face of death with being a real Christian. On June 8, 1773, for example, Wesley wrote to Ms. Cummins in the following fashion:

O make haste! Be a Christian, a real Bible Christian now! You may say, 'Nay, I am a Christian already.' I fear not. (See how freely I speak.) A *Christian is not afraid to die*. Are not you? Do you desire to depart and to be with Christ?⁴⁶

So then, if the elderly Wesley affirmed in 1773 that a real Christian is one who is not afraid to die, then what does that make him while he was in Georgia? The implication is clear.

Yet another characteristic of real Christianity which Wesley developed during this last period was that of "[having] the mind which was in Christ and [walking] as He walked."⁴⁷ Real Christians, in other words, are those whose inward (and outward) lives have been transformed by the bountiful grace of God. "Unless they have new

senses, ideas, passions, [and] tempers," Wesley counsels, "they are no Christians."⁴⁸ Unfortunately, on the other hand, "English Christians in general," Wesley wryly notes in 1776, "know no more of Christian salvation [and hence of this inner transformation] than Mahometans or heathens."⁴⁹

Beyond this, during the decade of the 1780s Wesley continued to highlight the distinction between nominal and real Christians, and pointed out in his sermon, *The New Creation* that the former "have the form of godliness without the power."⁵⁰ Moreover, as in an earlier period, he once again reflected back on the Oxford Methodists and avowed that their design was nothing less than to be "Bible Christians,"⁵¹ that their goal was above all to help each other to be "real Christians."⁵² But perhaps the most noteworthy accent during this late interval of Wesley's life was his strong identification of real, scriptural Christianity with the new birth and, therefore, with all the marks of the new birth—like faith, hope and love—as well. Accordingly, in his sermon, *Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith* Wesley proclaims:

How short is this description of real Christians! And yet how exceeding full! It comprehends, it sums up, the whole experience of those that are truly such, from the time they are born of God till they remove into Abraham's bosom. For who are the 'we' that are here spoken of? All that are true Christian believers. I say 'Christian,' not 'Jewish' believers. All that are not only *servants* but *children* of God.⁵³

And a year later, in 1789, Wesley's strong identification of real Christianity with regeneration, with the children of God, is again unmistakable. "How great a thing it is to be a Christian," he declares in his sermon *On a Single Eye*, "to be a real, inward, scriptural Christian! Conformed in heart and life to the will of God! Who is sufficient for these things? None, *unless he be born of God*."⁵⁴

A. The Faith of a Servant

In a letter to Alexander Knox during 1777, Wesley, once again, clearly articulates an intermediate state between a child of God and a child of the devil, namely, a servant of God.⁵⁵ "You are not yet a son," Wesley advises Mr. Knox, "but you are a servant; and you are waiting for the Spirit of adoption."⁵⁶ Similarly, in his sermon *On Faith*, written in 1788, the Methodist leader displays what properly constitutes the difference between a servant and a child of God: "He that believeth as a child of God 'hath the witness in himself.' This the servant hath not."⁵⁷ As in the preceding period, Wesley contends that he or she who is a servant of God, who "feareth God and worketh righteousness," is accepted of God even now, although he now states much more pointedly that they are accepted to a *degree* as illustrated in his sermon *On Friendship with the World*, produced in 1786:

Those on the contrary 'are of God' who love God, or at least fear him, and keep his commandments. This is the lowest character of those that 'are of God,' who are not properly sons, but servants.⁵⁸

To be sure, in his early ministry, John Wesley had not fully appreciated the notion that those who fear God and work righteousness are indeed accepted of him, and

because of this failure in understanding, he and his brother caused great harm among those who were attentive to the early Methodist preaching. And in 1788, reflecting on this unfortunate situation, Wesley confessed:

Indeed nearly fifty years ago, when the preachers commonly called Methodists began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprised of the difference between a servant and a child of God. They did not clearly understand that even one 'who feared God, and worketh righteousness', is accepted of him.⁵⁹

That Wesley in 1788 (and much earlier) had a greater appreciation of the faith of those "who feared God and worked righteousness" is clear, but this last point of acceptance must, once again, not be mistaken for justification or with being a real Christian which is quite a different matter. Observe that the Oxonian holds two ideas together: on the one hand, he or she who fears God is not a rank unbeliever, but on the other hand, "One that fears God is [still] waiting for His salvation."⁶⁰ In other words, though the servants of God lack the proper Christian faith—and hence cannot enjoy the privileges of the sons and daughters of God—they yet have a measure of faith which, as noted earlier, arises from the prevenient and convincing grace which precedes it, and are *for that reason* not to be discouraged. Consequently, Wesley's seasoned and relatively favorable estimation of the faith of a servant probably emerged from his consideration that such a faith, in the normal course of spiritual development, would in time become the faith of a son. In fact, in his sermon *On Faith*, Wesley highlights just such a consideration:

And, indeed, *unless the servants of God halt by the way*, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the *faith* of the children of God by his *revealing* his only-begotten Son in their hearts.... And whosoever hath this, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.⁶¹

Likewise, Wesley's appreciation of a degree of acceptance and his exhortation to the servants of God to improve the rich grace of God is revealed in a homily produced in 1788, *On the Discoveries of Faith*, in which Wesley counsels:

Whoever has attained this, the faith of a servant...in consequence of which he is *in a degree* (as the Apostle observes), 'accepted with him'...Nevertheless he should be exhorted not to stop there; not to rest till he attains the adoption of sons; till he obeys out of love, which is the privilege of all the *children* of God.⁶²

Simply put, the faith of a servant of God is valued not only for the measure of faith that it is, but also for what it will soon become: the qualitatively different faith of a child of God.

The Doctrine of Assurance

By 1771, Wesley had distinguished full assurance, which excludes doubt and fear, from initial assurance which does not;⁶³ he had come to a greater appreciation of the faith of a servant and its degree of acceptance; and he had realized that in exceptional cases one may even be justified and yet lack assurance due to either ignorance of the

gospel promises or due to bodily disorder. Nevertheless, the theme which Wesley chose to develop during this last period of his life was none other than a strong identification of assurance with the proper (real) Christian faith. To illustrate, in his sermon *On the Trinity* Wesley declares:

But I know not how *anyone* can be a Christian believer till 'he hath (as St. John speaks) 'the witness in himself'; till 'the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit 'that he is a child of God'—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of the Son....⁶⁴

Similarly, in January 1787, Wesley acknowledged that "To believe Christ gave Himself for me is the faith of a Christian,"⁶⁵ and a year later he not only once again clarified the distinction between the faith of a servant and that of a son, but he also maintained that assurance is an integral component of the proper Christian faith. In his sermon, *On Faith*, Wesley reasons:

Thus the faith of a child is *properly and directly* a divine conviction whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, 'The life that I now live, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And *whosoever hath this*, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.⁶⁶

Even more significantly, there is nothing in Wesley's often-quoted letter to Melville Horne in 1788 which detracts from this identification and emphasis. Thus, in this correspondence, Wesley maintains that the servants of God who lack assurance are not thereby condemned, a commonplace by now, but he then goes on to assert—and this is what has been missed by current scholarship—that "we preach assurance as we always did, as a *common* privilege of the children of God...."⁶⁷

IV. SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

For the sake of greater clarity and also in order to display the comprehensive view which emerges from this brief study of the motif of real Christianity in the writings of John Wesley, the following theses are offered for consideration:

Theses Relevant to Future Discussions

I. The Faith of a Servant

A.) Wesley specifically identified the faith of a servant with the spirit of bondage.

1.) The characteristics of the spirit of bondage are sorrow and remorse; fear of God, death, the devil, and humanity; and the desire, but not the ability, to break free from the chains of sin.

B.) The faith of a servant lacks assurance (the witness of the Spirit).

C.) Though Wesley eventually came to realize that the faith of a servant involves a degree of acceptance, such faith does not constitute justifying faith (See thesis # II.B.1 below).

D.) Wesley taught that the faith of a servant, in the normal course of spiritual development, should in time become the faith of a son or daughter of God.

II. Assurance

A.) By the summer of 1740, Wesley realized that justifying faith does not imply full assurance since it is often marked by both doubt and fear.

B.) At least by 1747 (and possibly as early as 1745), Wesley maintained that assurance does not always accompany justifying faith. Nevertheless, he repeatedly affirmed that assurance is the *common* privilege of the children of God.

1.) In 1768, Wesley reasoned that the exceptions to the normal association of justifying faith and assurance are usually the result of bodily disorder or of ignorance of the gospel promises. However, since these believers are both justified and regenerated, they are more suitably referred to not as servants, but as the sons and daughters of God.

Therefore:

C.) All servants lack assurance and are under a spirit of bondage, but not all who lack assurance are thereby servants nor are they all under a spirit of bondage. There are, after all, exceptional cases.

III. Real Christianity

A.) Wesley developed the motif of real Christianity from the time he saw the goal of religion in 1725 until his death in 1791.

B.) At its minimum, real Christianity entails regeneration (and therefore freedom from the power of sin), as one of its principal characteristics. In fact, it was precisely the mature Wesley who stressed this identification in his sermons *Walking by Sight* and *Walking by Faith* (1788) and *On a Single Eye* (1789).

C.) Since Wesley taught that justification occurs simultaneously with regeneration (although they can be distinguished logically), then real Christianity must also entail justification by faith (and therefore freedom from the guilt of sin).

D.) In almost every instance where the mature Wesley employed the phrases "real Christianity" or "proper Christianity" or "Scriptural Christianity" he was referring to the theological complex of justification and regeneration by faith and a measure of assurance. In other words, the Methodist leader almost never identified a faith which lacks assurance (the faith of a servant) with the real, proper Christian faith.

E.) By his own definition, then, Aldersgate was the time when John Wesley became a real Christian.

Given the preceding evidence which has been carefully culled from Wesley's entire literary corpus, recent—and some not so recent—pronouncements on the subject of Wesley's understanding of the motif of real Christianity as well as the value he placed on his Aldersgate experience in light of this motif must now be reassessed by the scholarly community. Indeed, since the elderly Wesley continually defined real Christianity in terms of justification, regeneration, and a measure of assurance, then his Aldersgate experience, contrary to Albert Outler, must now be viewed as the time when the Oxonian became a real, true, scriptural Christian. In fact, even if Aldersgate is simply deemed the time when the last piece of the puzzle, so to speak, was put in place, namely, assurance, as Maddox and others seem to suggest,⁶⁸ the conclusion

remains the same: that is, May 24, 1738, was the time when John Wesley had the faith, not of a servant, but of a son; when he had the faith, in other words, of one who had finally entered into "the kingdom of God."⁶⁹

Endnotes

1. Albert C. Outler, "Beyond Pietism: Aldersgate in Context," *Motive* (May 1963): 12.
2. Theodore W. Jennings, "John Wesley Against Aldersgate," *Quarterly Review*, 8 (Fall 1988): 16. Bracketed material represents a change of tense.
3. Randy Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville: Kingswood Book, 1990), p. 13.
4. Jennings, who is typical of this tendency, writes: "Neither before nor after [Aldersgate] did Wesley find it possible to 'love' the God he so vigorously served. Yet serve he did, whether as servant or as son; and in the end that was all that mattered to him." Cf. Jennings, "Against Aldersgate," p. 19.
5. Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, The Letters* 25 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 209.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
7. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.*, 1 (London: The Epworth Press, 1931): 251.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
9. Baker, *Letters*, 26:229.
10. Cf. Maddox, *Aldersgate*, p. 13, and Jennings, "Against Aldersgate," p. 16.
11. Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, The Sermons* 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984): 35-36. Emphasis added.
12. *Ibid.*, 1:258.
13. *Ibid.* Observe that the servants of God are awakened, but they see not a God of love, but One of wrath. It is, therefore, important not to confuse the issue of awakening with regeneration (and conversion).
14. Baker, *Letters*, 25:575. Also note that although Wesley eventually made the distinctions between freedom from the guilt (justification), power (regeneration), and the being (entire sanctification) of sin, as evidenced in his sermon *On Sin in Believers*, he continually maintained that even a babe in Christ has freedom from the power of sin. Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:314ff.
15. Richard P. Heitzenrater, "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity," in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), pp. 88-91.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
18. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:314ff.
19. Jackson, *Works*, 8:276.
20. *Ibid.*, 8:232.
21. *Ibid.*, 8:293.
22. *Ibid.* Bracketed material is added.
23. Baker, *Letters*, 26:254-255. Emphasis added.
24. Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). For a detailed examination of the influence of the early German Pietists on the thought of John Wesley, cf. Kenneth J. Collins, "The Influence of Early German Pietism on John Wesley," *The Covenant Quarterly*, 48 (November 1990): 23-42.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

26. Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 4 (London: The Epworth Press, 1938): 124.
27. Telford, *Letters*, 3:172.
28. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:419.
29. *Ibid.*, 1:436.
30. Telford, *Letters*, 4:120. Moreover, in *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* Wesley maintains that the Methodists had one point in view, namely, "to be altogether, scriptural, rational Christians." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 5:153-154.
31. *Ibid.*, 5:137.
32. *Ibid.*, 4:263-264. See also Curnock, *Journal*, 5:87, where Wesley refers to the Methodists of "the old stamp" in terms of the larger motif of real Christianity.
33. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmull Publishers), p. 646. In this commentary on Jude, Wesley also defines a servant in a second sense as one who has the spirit of adoption, but note that this is a definition which is rarely used and is *not* the one which forms the first prong of the distinction the faith of a servant/the faith of a son since only the latter prong is marked by the spirit of adoption. Cf. Wesley, *Notes*, p. 646.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
35. *Ibid.*
36. See Wesley's sermon *On Conscience* for more details on this aspect of "prevenient grace in Outler, *Sermons*, 3:480ff.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
38. Telford, *Letters*, 5:207. See also 5:86 for the letter of 1768. Emphasis added.
39. Baker, *Letters*, 26:575. Observe, however, that Wesley slipped back into his all or nothing language a few years later in 1759 when he wrote: "Is He not still striving with you? Striving to make you not almost but altogether a Christian? Indeed, you must be all or nothing—a saint or a devil, eminent in sin or holiness!" Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 4:52.
40. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Telford, *Letters*, 3:163. Nevertheless, not even this significant exception undermined Wesley's strong association of real Christianity and assurance. Indeed, a month later, in March 1756, Wesley wrote to Richard Tompson: "My belief in general is this—that every Christian believer has a divine conviction of his reconciliation with God." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 3:174.
44. *Ibid.*, 5:358.
45. In addition, Wesley wrote to Dr. Rutherford in 1768: "Therefore I have not for many years thought a consciousness of acceptance to be essential to justifying faith." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 5:359. See also Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 68-69.
46. Telford, *Letters*, 6:31. Emphasis added.
47. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:467. Bracketed material represents a change of verbal form.
48. *Ibid.*, 4:175. Bracketed material is added.
49. Telford, *Letters*, 6:201. Bracketed material is added.
50. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:501. See also 3:152.
51. Telford, *Letters*, 7:331.
52. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:452-453.
53. *Ibid.*, 4:49.
54. *Ibid.*, 4:121-122. Emphasis is added. For a technical, detailed and critical discussion of Outler's argument that the later Wesley moved away from his earlier exclusivist standards of

true faith and salvation see chapter six in my forthcoming book *Evangelical Christianity: John Wesley's Homilectical Theology*.

55. Telford, *Letters*, 6:272-273.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:498.

58. *Ibid.*, 3:130.

59. *Ibid.*, 3:497. See also Wesley's letter to Melville Horne at about the same time. Cf. Robert Southey, *The Life of John Wesley* (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1820) 1: 258.

60. Telford, *Letters*, 7:157.

61. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:497-498. The first emphasis is added.

62. *Ibid.*, 4:35.

63. For two important references to Wesley's doctrine of full assurance Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:549, and 4:36.

64. *Ibid.*, 2:385. Emphasis added.

65. Telford, *Letters*, 7:361-362.

66. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:497-498. Emphasis added.

67. Robert Southey, *The Life of John Wesley* 1 (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1820): 258. Emphasis added. That Wesley maintains that assurance is the *common* privilege of the sons and daughters of God suggests that it is rare when assurance, marked by doubt and fear, does not soon follow the new birth.

68. Maddox, *Aldersgate*, p.145.

69. Telford, *Letters*, 5:207. Even if one argues that Wesley was justified and born of God by faith well prior to Aldersgate—not a likely hypothesis by the way—and that he was simply waiting for assurance on May 24th, it must be pointed out that, technically speaking, one who experiences justification and regeneration apart from assurance, although this represents an exceptional case and although this believer is rightly called a child of God, yet without this assurance such a believer lacks a vital ingredient of what the later Wesley termed the real, true Christian faith.

JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN: THE COMFORT AND CHALLENGE OF OPEN FRIENDSHIP

STEPHEN RHODES

In his little book, *Experiences of God*, Jürgen Moltmann tells the story of how he became a Christian near the end of World War II. After being captured by the British in 1945, he was in prison camps in Belgium and Britain for over three years. During that time, he was forced to reckon with the horrors of Auschwitz and the other crimes of his nation, while at the same time dealing with the "death of all the mainstays that had sustained my life up to then."¹ He had not been raised as a Christian, and when an army chaplain gave him a New Testament (with Psalms), his first reaction was to scoff.

Nevertheless, the Psalms, in particular, helped him to voice his own suffering and to discover God's presence in it. Moltmann describes his coming to faith as a profound mystery grounded in "a hope for which there was no evidence at all."² However, the Bible and the little chapel in the center of the camp were important signs of that hope—symbols to which he could return again and again.

Out of this foundational experience of God, Moltmann came to an acute awareness of the importance of hope for human existence. His comments about the nature of this hope are pivotal for understanding the whole of his theological writing since that time:

This experience of not sinking into the abyss but of being held up from afar was the beginning of a clear hope, without which it is impossible to live at all. At the same time, even this hope cut two ways: on the one hand it provided the strength to get up again after every inward or outward defeat; on the other hand

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it made the soul rub itself raw on the barbed wire, making it impossible to settle down in captivity or come to terms with it.³

HOPE AS COMFORT AND CHALLENGE

Both the content and method of Moltmann's theology are profoundly shaped by this two-edged hope that lies at the center of Christian faith. The *content* of his theology has always had two foci. On the one hand, Christians and the church are called and, indeed, drawn into a transformative life that rubs raw against the realities of evil and suffering in our world. Yet, on the other hand, the people of God continually draw comfort and confidence from Jesus Christ who is already the first-fruits of the new creation.

This second aspect is sometimes missed by Moltmann's critics who, from time to time, accuse him of emphasizing change at the expense of constancy or becoming at the cost of being. In fact, however, Moltmann's entire theological work hinges upon his and the church's confidence that the New Testament is right when it asserts that Jesus Christ is already the Lord of existence. Change and redemption are possible only because of this fixed assurance about who God is towards us and our world.

Moltmann's *method* for doing theology is likewise reflective of the double-edged nature of Christian hope. When he turns to classical sources of Christian faith, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, he seeks to show how such a doctrine offers profound comfort to those who feel that God is far removed from the horrendous suffering associated with modern totalitarian states and technocracies. Nevertheless, when he affirms God's depth experience of suffering, he goes on to assert that this suffering of God is the most powerful impetus for social transformation and reform. Likewise, in his studies of contemporary thinkers as diverse as Jewish mystics and neo-Marxists, he finds the signs and shape of God's redemptive activity in modern history. Invariably, Moltmann uses these thinkers to *assure* Christians that God is still coming to our broken world offering us hope. At the same time, he *challenges* Christians to resist the notion that the current world order must necessarily continue with its "business as usual" cycle of violence and emptiness.

Thus, in method and content, Moltmann's theology understands God's love for all of creation to be fundamentally the basis for both comforting assurance and bold challenges to the status quo. This double emphasis helps to explain why Moltmann's writings seem serendipitously encyclopedic, if not at times eclectic. For where previous theologians attempted to write systematically, Moltmann has sought to demonstrate the profound relevance of Christian faith to the rapidly shifting landscape of our global village. In the face of a continuing sense of despair and disempowerment among modern people, he has shown how deep within the Christian faith there is always an assuring and challenging Word.

Moltmann has written extensively upon a wide range of issues facing the modern world and church: movements for democracy and social justice, environmental ethics, church governance, and psychoanalysis, to name but a few. His theology has contributed in important ways to the thinking of Latin American liberation theologians, the new openness between the churches of the East and of the West, and to improved relations between Jews and Christians. More than being simply a writer and thinker, he has worked aggressively in Germany for nuclear disarmament, supported the work of communities for the handicapped, and has been in the forefront of the ecumenical movement.

Two broad themes tie together the wide range of his writings and commitments: openness and friendship. Each theme reveals much about how Moltmann understands the nature and activity of God in relation to our world.

OPENNESS: MAKING ROOM FOR DIFFERENCE

In the book that brought him early acclaim, *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann makes a central claim that runs through all of his writings: Hope in Jesus Christ reveals "the open possibilities of history."⁴ The God who creates out of nothing and raises from the dead invests all of existence with possibilities for life. Thus, far from turning the church's attention away from the present life or human suffering, hope in Christ brings "to light how open all things are to the possibilities in which they can live and shall live."⁵ More specifically, this means that in trusting the God of hope, people of faith are enabled to move beyond the expectations of the culture of sameness to love the "unlike, the unworthy, the worthless, the lost, the transient and the dead."⁶ Where the world (and often the church) closes the doors to those who are different, God throws open the doors of hope and fellowship. Comfort is given to the lost, and a challenge, as well, to move beyond the cynicism that keeps the doors of history closed.

Thus, Moltmann repudiates the two closely allied notions that the future is simply an extension of the present and that stability in church and society requires a fundamental uniformity or sameness. The tendency in communities towards "like seeing like" runs counter to the whole thrust of the gospel, as does a similar view of history that simply expects more of the same, albeit in different costumes and hues. Nothing crushes or numbs people's hope more than a view of the world as unchangeable sameness. Ironically, many church people, along with their secular counterparts, seek the supposed security of a sectarian ghetto or seek to erase all distinctiveness in an assimilating religion based upon the lowest common denominator.⁷ This descent into sameness contradicts the gospel because

In concrete terms, God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God. His grace is revealed in sinners. His righteousness is revealed in the unrighteous and in those without rights, and his gracious election in the damned.⁸

In order to keep "like seeking like" from blinding us to hopeful openness, Moltmann contends that the gospel points us to seek ourselves also in what is different or opposite. For this is what God has done in the cross of Jesus Christ.

At a time when ethnic and social groups around the world are retreating into themselves and Christian denominations are more resistant to ecumenism, Moltmann's theology of openness gives a reason for such groups to look outside themselves to find themselves and God. If God is made known in the different and opposite, the church "cannot consist of an assembly of like persons who mutually affirm each other, but must be constituted of unlike persons."⁹ Indeed open fellowship with marginalized and devalued persons as well as with those who are simply different is a hallmark of Moltmann's ethics and particularly his doctrine of the church.

A central characteristic of a church that is faithful to Christ is "open friendship."¹⁰ By this, Moltmann means that the church must be a community in which "public protection and public respect" are given to the poor, to tax-collectors and sinners.¹¹ Such friendship

cannot be only a private matter or one that remains at a level of superficial affection. Matthew 25 figures prominently in this conception of friendship and requires us not only to visit the least of the brothers and sisters but to recognize and respect the hidden presence of Christ in these persons. Those who are often rejected by society are not to be the *objects* of Christian service but must be understood as *subjects* in the kingdom of God and as those who are fellow members with Christ in that kingdom.¹²

A similar view characterizes his views on relations between Christians and Jews. The church must move not only beyond the crass forms of anti-semitism of the past but also beyond more subtle and resilient notions that the church somehow replaces or supersedes Israel in the unfolding of God's plan for the redemption of the world. The religion that is different from Christianity is in fact a sister religion whose destiny is inextricable from that of the church. In being true to its calling, Judaism reminds Christianity that the latter has not fulfilled its own mandates and that evidence of the Messiah's redemption of the world is far from convincing. By the same token, the church reminds Israel that reconciliation between God and the world is present reality without which true hope cannot be operable. Thus, the two religions "make each other jealous," and are "thorns in each other's sides" in order to fulfill their equally legitimate roles in God's plan of salvation.¹³ Again, openness to that which is different is an essential place where followers of the gospel find the comfort and confidence they need for transformative discipleship in the modern world.

A final example of openness in Moltmann's theology lies in the way he understands openness to creation or nature. He begins with the nature and activity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He understands God's creative activity as God "cutting God's self off from God's self" in order to "give God's self away to the beings God has created."¹⁴ The Spirit, who "broods over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2) is God's presence with what God has previously made as God's *other*—different from God.

Moltmann borrows from the Jewish mystical notion of *Zimsum* to make this point more dramatically.¹⁵ In creating the world, God makes a space within God's self for that which is other than God. Put another way, God's love and respect for creation is so great that God makes room *within God* for what is different from God and for what is not yet as God intends it. Thus, this powerfully maternal conception of God becomes the basis for relating to nature with the same kind of open friendship we have seen before. Nature is not simply to be dismissed as inconsequential or secondary in God's plans. In its very "otherness" it is the place where God dwells and makes promises. Neither, however, is nature to be absorbed into God or God's purposes, nor into *our* visions of a nice orderly cosmos. Nature has an integrity—the status of partnership—of its own in God's plans for creation alongside the partnership attributed to humanity.

FRIENDSHIP

One can already see in Moltmann's concept of openness striking traces of the other important theme of friendship. For openness to the different "other" is an essential precondition for friendship. When we move to the specific realm of friendship, however, openness takes the form of love—a love that is characterized by partnership and empathy.

Perhaps nowhere does Moltmann ground his ethics and understanding of the church more clearly in the nature of God than he does with regard to friendship. For it is loving

friendship that is most characteristic of God in relation to us *as well as in relation to God's self*. And, it is friendship that Moltmann describes as the fullest expression of our right-relatedness to God.¹⁶ Therefore, to describe the friendship Christians are called into, we must first describe the friendship of the Trinitarian God.

It is in the very nature of God to be self-differentiated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is, therefore, fundamentally a *relational* being. To those who are disturbed by how God can be both "three" and "one," Moltmann answers that the key to this mystery is friendship *within* God. That is to say, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are unified—one—in the love that animates the life of God. Yes, as the ancient church has taught us, God is one in substance, but equally important, God is one in the unity of love among the three Persons of the Trinity.¹⁷ How do we know this? We know this through Jesus Christ who, while "equal with God" (Philippians 2:6), was nevertheless a *distinct* subject who chose to obey the Father in bearing God's friendship to the world. Jesus Christ is God the Son, not God the Father. Nonetheless, the two are one in the love, or friendship, which unites them. The same can be said of the relationship that exists between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son.

Moltmann is struck by how the three Persons of the Trinity can be distinct subjects and yet one without lapsing into the domination by one subject of the other two or without flying apart in three different directions. For after all, this is what often happens in human relationships and social arrangements. Either our distinctions drive a wedge between us or an oppressive oneness suppresses our distinctions—one party must rule and one way of thinking must dominate.

In the case of domination by oneness, a Trinitarian theology that emphasizes the dominance of the Father over the Son and Holy Spirit will be aligned with a similar view of human relationships. For example, in such a view of church governance, one God rules over one Christ who rules over one bishop, who rules over one priest, who, in turn, rules over one congregation. In politics, one God rules over one Christ, who rules over one king, who rules over one empire. In families, one God rules over one Christ who rules over one man, who rules over one woman, who, in turn, rules over the children.¹⁸

While political thinkers in the modern West do not often appeal to the divine right of kings anymore, the monolithic and hierarchical view of God continues to have power in a number of modern Christian understandings of church and family. Moreover, while politicians rarely appeal explicitly to the authority of an undifferentiated and dominating God, it is clear that such a God would describe the role played by party or personality in many modern political systems.

If, by contrast, the unity of the Trinitarian Persons is understood as the dynamic love that flows between and out of three distinct and equal subjects, then a markedly different vision of human relationships is possible. False or forced uniformity is out of the question and domination is replaced by partnership. For this reason Moltmann advocates a political system of democratic socialism because it lifts up a vision of political beings who freely choose to serve each other in order to support the common good. For the same reason, he is an antifederalist, wanting to decentralize government in order to encourage a greater sense of ownership and participation by grassroots citizens.

Likewise, regarding the church, Moltmann opposes hierarchical governance. Instead, he

emphasizes grassroots partnership and the church as a community of those who freely choose to live in mutual service to the world. He seems to suggest that Reformed churches add fellowship as a third essential mark of the church in addition to "the Word rightly proclaimed and sacraments rightly administered."¹⁹ He makes similar arguments for families that are built around complementarity and equality as opposed to domination and hierarchy.

But if Moltmann successfully blunts the danger of the monolithic, unitarian God, does he not, thereby, open the door to three gods going in three different directions? And, in emphasizing the distinctness of the divine subjects, does he not thereby contribute to the centrifugal "balkanization" of modern social life where the drive for independence destroys any shred of cooperation and understanding?

First of all, it should be apparent from Moltmann's critique of domination by oneness that what he lifts up as an alternative is genuine "partnership" or "fellowship," not disunified chaos. But second and more important, what keeps the Trinity—and redemptive human relationships—from flying apart is empathetic love.

By virtue of their eternal love they (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy. Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguish them from one another, (they) dwell in one another and communicate life to one another. The very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together.²⁰

To Moltmann, it is the capacity and willingness of God to enter fully into the life of the other that makes God able to love. Thus, for example, it is God's capacity for suffering that generates God's love whether among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or in relation to creation.

Far from pulling persons or social groups apart, this understanding of God envisions social relationships in which differences actually generate the *energy* of friendship. The love within and from the Trinitarian God is *empathetic* love. It is a love that is willing to enter fully into the life of the other. Thus, individuals and social groups are challenged to enter into conversation with each other in the same way the Christian has conversation with God in prayer. As friends of God, we are called, in mature prayer, not to beg, manipulate, or force God. Rather, we are invited to respect the other's freedom, to converse, and to share energies.²¹ By participating in each others' life, both parties are enriched. Out of this richness comes an overflowing or surplus of love which goes out into the world in search of fulfillment. This is the ultimate vision for human relationships that Moltmann derives from the Trinitarian God.

CONCLUSION

If people are to live in open friendship with each other, the cosmos, and God, then a strong hope must underlie this friendship. For, when love does flow out of redemptive friendship, it often meets resistance and despair. In order to have the courage necessary to face such obstacles, people of faith can only turn to the God who has gone before them in open friendship, who stands with them in their vulnerability and suffering, and who waits and works for the time when love will fill up all of creation. Until that time, for people of

faith, the friendship of God comforts and sustains us in every defeat. At the same time, however, it causes us to strain against the barbed wire that holds creation captive to destructiveness and despair.

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Notes

1. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p.7.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 32.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 28.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 28.
10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 119ff.
11. Ibid., p. 121.
12. For a fuller discussion, see *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 126-133; also *Hope for the Church*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 25.
13. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 149. See pages 136-150 for a fuller discussion.
14. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 15.
15. For a fuller discussion, see Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 86ff.
16. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 222.
17. Ibid., pp. 174ff.
18. Comments made by Professor Moltmann during a seminar at Emory University, October 1983.
19. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 314-317.
20. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 175.
21. Ibid., p.221.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE VULNERABLE KIND: CHRISTIAN DIALOGICAL PROCLAMATION AMONG MUSLIMS

A. H. MATHIAS ZAHNISER

Ted Hudson had just completed a very successful month of street witnessing in Rome.¹ The unexpected interest of the Italians in the Gospel and its ability to transform them had strengthened Ted's confidence in speaking openly about the Christian way of salvation. Now, a visit to Frankfurt, Germany, to see some old friends from his engineering school days afforded him a golden opportunity for sharing his faith—this time with a Muslim. But he was not prepared for the results.

His friends had asked Ahmad Mustafa, an Iranian, to put Ted up in the extra bed in his room. Their rooming together provided the two young men a chance to engage in what became a nearly night-long discussion. Ahmad, in his mid-thirties and away from wife, children and extended family for studies in Europe, was a humble man whose neat and clean appearance stood out—even in a country like Germany. Ahmad's love and loneliness for his family were matched only by his appreciation for his Islamic faith and the purity which it required. Both family and purity would dominate the long discussion between the two men and the significant events which occurred in its aftermath.

When Ahmad, whose parents and parents-in-law had arranged his happy marriage to his cousin, spoke of family, he included all his relatives, most of whom lived in the same vicinity in Iran. Unlike Ted, Ahmad did not think of himself as an individual apart from his family—his life was an extension of his family unit. For him, the freedom from family, which Ted's individualism required of him, would have been a kind of death. To Ahmad family was sacred.

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Ted shared with Ahmad the significance of his conversion to Christ and the exciting events that resulted from his month of mission in Italy. Ahmad talked enthusiastically about Islam—which he was sure was the way to God. He particularly stressed that purity of mind and body were important to Islamic faith. Even though he was not well-informed about Islam, Ted felt that the Spirit helped him to explain to Ahmad the cleansing from sin and the inner purity that he had experienced in Christ.

The next morning Ahmad related to Ted the details of a vivid dream he had during their short night's sleep. Clothed all in white, Ahmad found himself walking in a deep gutter with no way of escape. The harder he tried to avoid staining his white garments with the filth of the gutter, the more polluted they became. Overcome by his frustration, he went to the side of the gutter and wept. Suddenly a great torrent of water rushed over him leaving him on flat ground with his garments restored to a sparkling white. Relieved, but not yet feeling completely clean, he walked until he came to a river. Compelled by an inner demand, he waded into its current and lay down. Coming up out of the river, he felt completely clean inside and out.

When Ahmad asked him what he thought of the dream, Ted read the story of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus recorded in John's Gospel and all the other passages on baptism and the new birth that he could think of. Ted could tell that the Spirit was at work because Ahmad seemed to take the Bible readings and the dream as God speaking to him. Eventually, Ted asked Ahmad if he would consider becoming a Christian. Ahmad informed Ted that if he did become a Christian "his family would treat him as though he were dead.

Months later Ted would write, "I thought of the verses where Jesus talks about loving him more than his father and mother and began to realize the radical nature of what Christ was saying to the people of his day." But he did not have the heart to recite these verses to Ahmad.

Thoughts raced through Ted's head: If Ahmad were to convert, he would lose all that was sacred to him—the faith which had taught him the importance of purity and the family that was the joy of his life. Yet where else could he find the purity that Islam urged upon him but in Christ? Ahmad's family life seemed closer to God's design than Ted's own; and Ahmad's desire for purity and attempts to obtain it, though unfulfilled, seemed to Ted more respectable than his own. Yet he and not Ahmad had found cleansing from sin and inner satisfaction in Christ. Although Ted felt that Ahmad had been moved by the Spirit, he could not bring himself to quote any more verses or press Ahmad any further.

Ted's experience with Ahmad, a devout Muslim, illustrates three crucial dimensions of Christian witness among Muslims: (1) the importance of intimate dialogue, (2) the work of God's Spirit in prevenient grace, and (3) the role of vulnerability in being convincing. Taken together, these dimensions compose an approach or model for evangelism which I call, "close encounters of the vulnerable kind."

DIALOGICAL PROCLAMATION

Ted had spent a month in Italy proclaiming the Gospel; he had experienced the heady and holy joy of seeing people come to Christ through street witness. The

majority of these people had some kind of Christian background; and, as far as I know, none of the persons who accepted Christ in Italy were Muslims. Ahmad was a Muslim for whom becoming a Christian meant losing what he held most sacred—his family and his faith.

Yet Ahmad would not have been facing these choices if it had not been for the witness of Ted—not through the proclamation of street witnessing, but through the intimacy of a long evening's conversation. Their experience fits Ruel Howe's well-known definition of dialogue: "the serious address and response between two or more persons, in which the being and truth of each is confronted by the being and truth of the other."² The seriousness of the conversation between Ted and Ahmad can hardly be denied; it literally dealt with life and death matters. And both found themselves challenged by the life and faith of the other.

Readers may contrast proclamation, the presentation of the claims of Christ so as to influence people to trust in Him for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, with inter-faith dialogue, a mere sharing of information about religion. Yet in the case of Ted and Ahmad, dialogue led to conviction of sin, if not to conversion and incorporation into the body of Christ. Dialogue has a lot to commend it as an approach to the proclamation of the Gospel.³

Dialogue and Understanding

In a dialogical context Christians increase their understanding of Islam. Ted came to wish that he had known more about Islam than he did at the time of his dialogue with Ahmad; yet even if his proclamation had been better informed about Islam, had he not come to understand the Islam of Ahmad through dialogue, his witness would have been far less effective.

One of my very memorable experiences of learning about Islam occurred in Chicago where my students and I were listening to Muslims, questioning them, and sharing with them. I had read that Christians incorrectly compare Muhammad to Jesus and the Qur'an to the Bible. The Qur'an compares to Jesus in that both represent the primary focus of divine revelation.⁴ I presented this idea to our hosts as follows: "It is my understanding that according to Christians, God reveals Himself in Jesus, while, according to Muslims, God reveals Himself in the Qur'an." To my surprise, they all said, "No, God does not reveal *Himself*; in the Qur'an he reveals *His will*." They went on to insist that God cannot be known because nothing analogous to Him exists in human experience on the basis of which humans could comprehend Him. Sometime later, immediately after speaking at a church in Michigan on Christian witness to Muslims, I was confronted by a bright young man with a serious objection to my conviction that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. I asked him how, since but one God exists, we could be worshiping different gods? He said, "But their concept of God is false." "Muslims do have a different view of God," I replied, "but isn't it the same God that they claim to be speaking about? After all, Christians worshipping in Arabic use the Arabic word *Allah* for God." "No," he insisted, "Muslims do not worship our God." The next person I talked to was an Iranian former Muslim who had become a Christian. I told him about my previous conversation. "I think you

are right," he said, "when I was a Muslim I loved and worshipped God; when I became a Christian I felt I *knew* him." What I had learned in dialogue proved true in experience: Muslims and Christians worship the same God; but through Christ God reveals Himself.⁵

However much we may know about Islam in general, we cannot understand the faith of the specific Muslims to whom we would proclaim the Gospel unless we enter into intimate dialogue with them.

Dialogue and Appreciation

In dialogue with Ahmad, Ted not only increased in understanding his partner's faith, he also came to appreciate it deeply and the family solidarity which resulted from it. Dialogical interaction with Muslims bears fruit in deep appreciation for them and their faith on the part of Christian participants. For example, most of my students come from a Christian tradition like my own in which ritualism is generally frowned upon in favor of meaningful spontaneity. Yet, one of the most distinct changes in my students' view of Islam resulted from the mere observation of the prayers which Muslims are required to perform in a carefully prescribed way five times a day. My students and I have come to appreciate Muslim piety and devotion almost to the point of envy.

But there is another side to this appreciation. Christians' lack of appreciation for Muslim faith, practice and culture has hindered evangelism. Tom Trueman, an experienced Christian worker among Muslims, laments the fact that the missiological practices which have so greatly improved evangelistic effectiveness among tribal peoples have only lately been introduced into Muslim mission practice. The practices to which he refers are based upon a high regard for the cultures of these peoples, whereas Christian missionaries to Muslims have typically undervalued Islam and Islamic culture, deeming it false, superficial and shallow. In part because of this lack of appreciation, Christian-Muslim relations have been characterized by fear, unfair criticism, inappropriate comparisons, arrogance, ridicule and violence. Trueman argues that missionaries who do not take seriously Muslim moral standards, manners, values, learning styles and leadership will not likely gain a hearing.⁶

As Ted discovered in his conversation with Ahmad, dialogue uncovers the positive dimensions of Islam, increasing appreciation. And as he reflected later on his failure to lead Ahmad further toward conversion to Christ, Ted wished that he could have recommended to Ahmad a Christian community in Iran which expressed its faith and life in forms similar enough to those of Islam that Ahmad and his whole family would have been attracted to it. Ted wished that Ahmad could have been like those first Jewish Christians who gave their lives to Christ without having to renounce their culture. Such a reasonable alternative will never be realized until we come to appreciate Islam.⁷

PREVENIENT GRACE AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

From the perspective of intimate dialogue, Ted became aware that the Holy Spirit had been at work in Ahmad's life preparing him for Ted's witness. Ted sensed the Spirit enabling his witness and discerned the work of the Spirit in Ahmad's response.

In a striking and obvious way, the Holy Spirit used Ahmad's dream and Ted's interpretation (which, by the way, Ahmad had requested of him) to help Ahmad realize that true purity, while unattainable by human effort, could be experienced through the river of the new birth.

In reflecting upon this memorable event several years later, Ted wrote,

God was much more understanding of Ahmad and his desire to be cleaner than I was. I grew up in California and thought that Ahmad was a bit strange for all his worry about modesty and cleanliness. However, God was moving far beyond my level of understanding and was speaking to Ahmad directly.⁸

I doubt that the Spirit would have worked in Ahmad so freely if it had not been for their intimate dialogue; and even if the Spirit had worked freely in Ahmad's experience, it is unlikely that Ted would ever have known it and been able to respond to it had he limited himself to street-witness proclamation.

According to John Wesley, God is at work in the lives of all people to bring them to repentance and saving faith.⁹ He called this action of God prior to salvation "prevenient" grace, or the grace that goes before. Given this prevenient gracious activity of God's spirit that goes on everywhere, it is foolish to proclaim the Gospel without first being sensitive to that activity among the people, or in the person, to whom we direct our witness. E. Stanley Jones, the missionary evangelist, calls the good things, the Christ-like light, scattered among the peoples of the world, "the very footprints of God." He goes on to say, "Everywhere that the mind of man has been open, through the crevices of that mind the light of God has shown in."¹⁰ Proclamation without dialogue, then, will miss the rich fruit born of discerning the work that God is already doing in the life of those to whom evangelistic witness is directed.

A startling example of prevenient grace emerged during a relatively brief dialogue in which I and some of my students were engaged with a small group of Jews. In the course of the discussion a young Jewess named Virginia asked me if I believed in proselytism. I said no that I did not and quoted what Jesus said about those who searched land and sea to make converts whom they turned into people twice the child of hell as themselves. Virginia replied impatiently, "No, no. Let's put it this way, would you like me to know Jesus?" I said, "Yes, Virginia; I would like you to know Jesus. Through Jesus I have come to know God, the most important reality in my life. There is no one I would not like to introduce to Jesus." "That is proselytism," she snapped. "Then I am guilty as charged," I admitted.

An orthodox Jew, whose name I have forgotten, then startled all of us by saying, "No, Virginia, I know what Matt means, for I too have come to know God through Jesus." He went on to explain that he had washed dishes with a student at Garrett Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, for three years. "Jesus was so visible in that man's life," he declared, "that it made me hungry for God." "If I had not had a rich Jewish heritage," he went on, "I would have become a Methodist."

As if we were not already adequately stunned by prevenient grace, Sylvan, a Reformed Jew in our circle, confessed, "I too have come to know God through Jesus." He went on to explain that through reading about Jesus in the Gospel of John he

came to know God. He was unsure about Christian doctrines, such as the trinity and the incarnation, and had remained Jewish. But, by his own testimony, he had come to know God through Jesus.¹¹

Ted's experience with Ahmad has given us a taste of the potential fruit of these close encounters where dialogue and proclamation come together. But intimate dialogue in which we attempt, as Ted did, to proclaim the Gospel, also extracts a price from the witness. Because we accept the risk of opening ourselves to our partners in dialogue, and because we accept the task of confronting them with the challenge of Christ's claims upon their precious lives, these close encounters involve risk and vulnerability.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE VULNERABLE KIND

Ted discovered his vulnerability to the faith and life of Ahmad in the course of their intimate dialogue. To be sure, Ted was able to bear witness to his own faith and to its transforming effect in his life. But he could not avoid the impact of Ahmad's deep personal quest for purity and the positive effect of Ahmad's faith on his family life. Furthermore, because the dialogue enabled Ted to get to know and admire Ahmad, he found it impossible to urge him to forsake faith and family even to receive from Christ the cleansing new birth that Ahmad's dream had promised. Thus, in dialogue we encounter two kinds of vulnerability. We experience both (1) the threat of being impacted by the faith and life of our partners in dialogue, and (2) the pain of having to put them in a position of anxiety and suffering. Or, put another way, we recoil from the threat of being converted that is born of the openness which intimate dialogue requires; and we recoil from the threat which Christian conversion poses to our partners, because the intimacy of dialogue makes us feel it so keenly.¹²

If Ted had encountered Ahmad on the street and offered the kind of street witness that had proven so fruitful among Italians, he would have avoided both kinds of vulnerability. But he would not have been the instrument of the Spirit's impact upon Ahmad that he was, and Ahmad would have been even less apt to accept the Gospel offer than he was. On the other hand, if Ted had avoided pressing upon Ahmad the claim that Christ could offer him the cleansing and purity of heart that his dream had promised, he would have avoided the pain of putting Ahmad in a position of anxiety and suffering. He could have avoided a lot of discomfort by satisfying himself with a friendly exchange of information about their two faiths.

In other words, we can avoid vulnerability by avoiding the closeness of dialogue in the process of proclamation, and we can escape vulnerability by avoiding the encounter of proclamation in the process of dialogue. But if we allow ourselves to engage in a close encounter that embeds proclamation in dialogue, as Ted did, we can expect to experience the kind of vulnerability that Ted experienced. But we shall also discover, as Ted did, that God works with us through his Spirit in the process. After all, God took the way of vulnerability in reconciling the world to himself through Christ (Phil. 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). In Christ, God subjected himself to the pain of human rejection and self-love. Through Christ, in love, God took upon himself the painful task of presenting human beings whom he loved with a choice between the

security of family and faith and the forgiveness, cleansing and wholeness that arrives when they give up all to follow him (Luke 14:25-27). In a sense, God's mission of vulnerability can be summed up in the short verse we Sunday school scholars always used when a memorized verse was called for, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

From the safe distance afforded by proclamation without dialogue, we can, without any real discomfort to ourselves, insist on those radical claims of our Lord which occasion a painful crisis of choice in our hearers. But unless we feel the kind of pain that made it hard for Ted to press these claims upon Ahmad, they are not likely to have much effect on a Muslim. Ted will learn by painful experience to press the radical claims of Jesus upon those partners in dialogue in whom he senses the Spirit at work. And they will take his message seriously because he will convey it in the same spirit that made it so hard to convey it to Ahmad. He will find in the Spirit of God the source of strength to accept those close encounters of the vulnerable kind which give the Spirit opportunity to engage his heart and the hearts of his partners in dialogue in the painful but liberating process of conviction (John 16:8).¹³

Notes

1. This dialogue between Ted and Ahmad is based on a case study done for one of my classes at Asbury Theological Seminary. The names and places have been disguised, but the narrative remains faithful to the case study.
2. Ruel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1963), p. 4.
3. The bibliography on dialogue is enormous. A particularly constructive discussion, which also has brevity to commend it, is Norman Anderson's in *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester, England and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), pp. 184-194.
4. Wilfred Cantwell Smith was the first to show that Jesus in Christianity is parallel to the Qur'an in Islam and not parallel to Muhammad (*Islam in Modern History* [New York, NY: New American Library, 1959], p. 25, n. 15). Seyyed Husein Nasr, a Muslim scholar, clarifies and enhances these connections well in *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Mandala Books London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979), pp. 43f. See my chapter in the *Proceedings of the Wheaton College Theology Conference*, 1992, " 'People of the Book' or 'People of the Person' "? (in press).
5. Kenneth Cragg has made this point very clear when he says: "Those who say that Allah is not 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' are right if they mean that God is not so described by Muslims. They are wrong if they mean that Allah is other than the God of the Christian faith." Putting the matter grammatically, Cragg concludes that "predicates about God may differ widely but God as the subject of differing predicates is the same subject," *The Call of the Minaret*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 30 and 31.
6. Tom Trueman, "Fresh Thinking on Muslim Missions," *Mission Frontiers* (December, 1989), pp. 8-11.
7. Phil Parshall in *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980) provides a detailed scenario of a community of Christians of Muslim background which is adjusted to their cultural and religious practices which are not incongruent with biblical faith. See also Charles H. Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society," *The Gospel and Islam: A Compendium*, Abridged Edition, ed. Don M. McCurry (Pasadena, CA: MARC, 1979), pp. 78-92.
8. From the case study mentioned in note one.
9. Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 45-46. See Wesley's sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" *The Works of*

John Wesley, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 3: 199-209. For a thorough discussion, see Charles A. Rogers, "The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1967). Mark Royster has examined this concept in relation to world evangelization in his dissertation, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Prevenient Grace in Missiological Perspective" (D.Miss. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1989). Olin Alfred Curtis' brief discussion of the divine side of preparation for Christian conversion could in fact be illustrated by Ahmad's experience. In brief outline, according to Curtis, God gives a vision of righteousness, a vision of the Holy God, a vision of sin, and a tender invitation, *The Christian Faith Personally Given in a System of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1956; a reprint of the original 1905 edition), pp. 351-352.

10. E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York, NY and Cincinnati, OH: Abingdon, 1925), pp. 186-187 (At least one other 1925 printing has the same material on page 176).

11. It was not possible to follow up on any of the participants in this unexpected dialogue.

12. E. Stanley Jones, who pioneered this dialogical approach to witness which I am calling for, stressed his own openness to conversion. In India, where he served as a missionary, dialogue between people of the major faiths was legitimate as long as it was assumed that nobody would change from one religion to another. When Jones spoke of conversion in his round table discussions, he precipitated some strong disagreement. He always responded to these objections by stressing his own openness to conversion (Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*). A recent advocate of dialogue in evangelization who stresses the importance of openness to conversion is Vincent J. Donovan. He argues that dialogue must be characterized by the sharing of the "authentic gospel" and "a true openness to conversion," *The Church in the Midst of Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 115-119. Whether the openness in dialogue is to a conversion to another religion, if truth should require it, one meaning of conversion to Jones, or to the conversion attending a deeper apprehension of the truth, requiring a radical rearrangement of priorities and commitments, the meaning of conversion to Donovan, it results in vulnerability and even anxiety.

13. The word in John 16:8 translated "convince" is from the Greek infinitive *elenchein*, a word that is used in the New Testament both in the sense of proving someone wrong and of convincing someone of something (Friedrich Büchsel, "Elencho," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964]). The kind of dialogue that I am suggesting here might be called "*elenctic*" from this Greek word.

AIDS AND THE WRATH OF GOD

DAVID J. BAGGETT

I

Is AIDS God's punishment of homosexuality? Yes, according to the confident claims of some Christians. For example, at least one notable Christian leader preaches this, and is by no means alone, concluding that the message God is sending to homosexuals through the affliction is that if "you do it, you die." Support for such a contention is found in the traditional scriptural interpretation of homosexuality as a sinful practice opposed to the will of God and deserving of judgment. Even Romans 1:27 may be cited, which speaks of what happened to certain homosexuals as that which they deserved. Essentially what this first option requires to account for the plague of AIDS today is the performance of a miracle of God, perhaps along the lines of Gordon Kaufmann's definition: "Any event which one finds himself led to interpret by reference to God's act rather than finite acts or causes (though not necessarily denying that such finite agency is also involved) is a miracle."¹

Other Christians are not quite so bold, answering with something of a "qualified yes" to the question. They endorse the idea that AIDS is the natural consequence or cost of this sin. It has been claimed that contracting AIDS through homosexual behavior is like getting hurt when running a red light, an infraction of the rules with an accompanying penalty attached. Other relevant examples would be dying from jumping off a tall building, developing emphysema from a lifetime of smoking, or suffering cirrhosis of the liver due to alcohol abuse. Biblical support for this position might take into account Paul's emphasis on the natural order and homosexuality as a violation of it with harmful consequences. At first glance it appears as if this option does

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not include God's intervening action, but further reflection may demonstrate otherwise.

Still other Christians emphatically respond, "No, God has nothing to do with AIDS, a disease caused by a virus that has, tragically, found its way into people's bloodstreams." These Christians are by no means ethically or doctrinally bankrupt; they may strongly affirm the traditional biblical interpretation of homosexuality as a sinful practice. It is the idea that God would deliberately afflict people with AIDS which goes against the grain of their thinking informed by a theology of a profoundly loving God.

Before I share the implications of my own reflections on the question, it is important to define what is meant by homosexuality. There is an important distinction to keep in mind between homosexual behavior and a homosexual orientation. Three possibilities to define homosexuality, then, are same gender sexual relations, same gender sexual desires, or both together. Most relevant for the discussion of this paper is homosexual *behavior*, since it is through the actual sexual act that AIDS is often transmitted, not merely through an orientation. A homosexual orientation is neither necessary nor sufficient for a homosexual transmission of the disease. Thus, homosexuality in this paper will be defined as same gender sexual relations.

The question now becomes this: Is AIDS God's punishment of same gender sexual relations? Once again, the various answers mentioned so far are an "unequivocal yes," a "qualified yes," and an "unequivocal no." I will attempt to solve the various dilemmas in which these three options find themselves by explaining my own "qualified no" to the question.

II

What are some of the dilemmas in which the answer of an "unequivocal yes" finds itself? An experiential dilemma springs from the obvious fact that not all homosexuals become afflicted with the disease. Some homosexuals simply go on living their lifestyle untainted by the virus which does not happen to be present among any of their lovers. Others remain free from the disease by taking necessary precautions, like using a condom. (That condoms are not always effective, though an important fact, does not detract from the point here.) Given these clear counterexamples to the assertion that AIDS is definitely God's punishment of same gender sexual relations, the only way to make sense of the claim is to assert that AIDS is God's punishment of homosexuality where the virus which produces the disease is present and where precautions either are not taken or do not work. This is not to mention the additional case of unsuccessful transmission of the disease when the virus is present even in the absence of any precautions.

Not only do some people who engage in homosexual behavior not contract AIDS, there are other people who never engage in it and yet still catch the disease. These include not only "guilty" intravenous drug users, but "innocent" babies victimized from birth along with recipients of polluted blood transfusions. If AIDS is God's punishment of homosexuals, then, it appears to be a deficient procedure, for some homosexuals escape the punishment while others innocent of homosexuality are included. It is natural to assume that the meting out of punishment by God would be intended to promote justice, not abrogate it, at least with regard to *our* limited grasp of what justice entails, not to mention *His*. We would certainly not expect God to act less morally than we ourselves would.

There is an uncanny resemblance, incidentally, between an old Calvinistic idea and

today's casual acceptance of the notion that God has singled out homosexuals for punishment. We are *all* deserving of God's wrath, it is acknowledged; yet it is still seen as perfectly appropriate that only homosexuals have been chosen for the actual punishment. This is similar to the historical Calvinistic defense of double predestination. How can we fault God, so the argument went, for sovereignly choosing some to go to heaven when everyone deserves hell?

Theologically, those who respond in the unequivocal affirmative must finally hold a weak view of both sin and God. In terms of sin, these believers, rather than taking all expressions of it with the utmost seriousness, can trivialize those sins other than that of homosexuality. They likely would not consider claiming that unhealthy eating habits are directly punished by God with heart disease, or prejudice with race wars. They insist, however, on stressing the punishment value of homosexuality, namely, AIDS. This tendency is especially clear in fundamentalist and some evangelical circles, which often seem straddled with blinders to all but sexual sins.

In terms of their view of God, what kind of God do they think they serve? A harsh, unforgiving, legalistic God anxious to level an excruciating, abominable disease on the wayward? Or a merciful Father in whose Son resides the forgiveness of all of our deepest, darkest sin; who graciously, patiently calls us to repent; and who is continually wooing us to Himself by His love? Without unbiblically compartmentalizing the characteristics of God and creating false dichotomies within His nature, we must critically assess our propositions about His work in the world in order to identify the dominant theology of God which undergirds our portrayals. The world must not be expected to differentiate between God, whose very nature is love, and our harsh caricatures of Him.

What about the homosexual who contracts AIDS and is then converted to Christ? All of the sins which he has ever committed have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, yet he still may die from the disease. Are we to believe that his life remains the price that God demands for his sin of homosexuality, when the infinitely costlier price of Jesus' life on the cross has already been paid? I find that untenable. Even the hardest heart at this point would be inclined to modify the claim and propose, instead, that this person's death is only the natural consequence of his sin. Thus we arrive at the second option, the "qualified yes."

III

This option does not ostensibly claim that God intervenes to inject the virus into the bodies of homosexuals, but that their sin has this disease as its natural consequence. Note that the emphasis here is on their *sin*, not simply their outward behavior understood neutrally. The consequence is claimed to derive from the spiritual significance of the physical behavior. This option is more defensible than the first. It takes more into account the natural processes of life by which disease is transmitted, for instance; but it retains some major weaknesses.

One potential weakness is the tenuous connection between the sinful act and the resultant disease. To speak meaningfully of a link here, as this option demands, requires that there be a real causal relationship between homosexuality as a sin, on the one hand, and AIDS, on the other. This connection is understood by proponents of the second option not merely on the level of physical causality, but by a causal link consistently functioning

between the physical and spiritual realms. That is, adherents of the second option claim that God in a meaningful way is punishing homosexuals, even if that claim remains implicit. The way this punishment is accomplished is through the natural means of a sexually transmitted virus, but the reason for the punishment is because the behavior is blameworthy spiritually and morally. Thus, the "qualified yes" adherents see a connection between the act of homosexuality *in its sinfulness* and the resultant disease. The strength of this connection is what will determine the tenability of this option.

Why is this connection weak? Again, one reason is that the transmission of the disease seems to have less to do with spiritual factors than with natural ones. If someone is wearing a condom and it serves its purpose properly, AIDS can often be avoided. This undermines the causal tie between the sin and the disease—if it is so readily contingent on such naturalistic, arbitrary factors as the proper use and functioning of a condom. AIDS is only the natural consequence of homosexual behavior where it is present, where it is not stopped by precautionary measures, and where it is transmitted. Are we to believe that the causal link between the sin of homosexuality and the disease of AIDS only applies in this range of situations? Once again, such a proposition, rather than taking all sin seriously, can seem to emphasize only the blameworthiness of homosexual behavior in those cases where there is an obvious physical consequence. Sinful behavior, however, is not only wrong when there is a painful earthly result, but all the time. It is innately and not merely consequentially wrong.

The analogy of the second option between AIDS and other examples of consequences in the physical realm breaks down, for at least two reasons. First, there is neglect of the aforementioned distinction between the levels at which the causal links are presumed to operate. That is, to claim that AIDS is a punishment from God or the direct cost of homosexuality is to propose the existence of a "vertical" (excuse the spatial metaphor) causal nexus between the spiritual reality of blameworthy sin and the physical reality of bodily sickness. That is clearly different from a simple, "horizontal" cause and effect operation within this physical world, such as the typical result of walking in front of a rushing train.

Secondly, AIDS is not part of the natural order, *per se*, but an intruder. It is a disease caused by the life of a virus that has been introduced into people's bloodstreams, where it was not originally intended to be. Can AIDS then with any confidence lay claim to be the *natural* consequence of homosexual behavior? Before its invasion, AIDS was not the result of homosexuality. Thus there is not the inherent connectedness between them as there is between, for example, cholesterol and arteriosclerosis. That there *appears* to be an intrinsic relationship between homosexuality and AIDS now, especially in this country, is only because of the particular spread of the disease to date, without which there would not be this visible connection. In Africa, where transmission has largely been heterosexual and polygamy is often still the norm, the relationship between AIDS and homosexuality is much less at issue.

The underlying claim of the second option, if it is to be a coherent argument, must be that God is the one responsible for that original unnatural invasion of the HIV virus into society which made AIDS the blameworthy consequence of homosexual behavior whenever such behavior transmits the virus. This is why the second option essentially reduces to only a qualification of option one.

Scripture, though, portrays God as being *against* disease and sickness, not its strongest promoter and propagator. David described God as the one who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases. Jesus came that we might have life, and that more abundantly; it is the enemy who comes to steal, kill and destroy. The presence of the kingdom of God was epitomized in the life of Jesus by the miraculous *deliverance from* sickness, not *relegation to* it. Those in the church who are sick are instructed to have hands laid on them by the elders so they may recover. Confession of sins and faults, one to another within the church, is for the purpose that healing may take place, with the added promise that, if sins have been committed, they will be forgiven. The Bible makes clear that God's will is that we enjoy good health, not be riddled with a chronic, terminal disease. Salvation is about holistic health and healing in every dimension of our existence, made possible through a right relationship with God.

IV

So does that mean God has nothing to do with the spread of AIDS, as the third option would have us believe? Not necessarily. The third option does rightly stress the central truth that God's nature is one of profound love along with His holiness. Those who would stress God's holiness today to the practical exclusion of His love not only have a fundamental misunderstanding of holiness, but risk becoming modern-day pharisees, considering themselves holier than others, and others worthy of death but not themselves. The third option certainly contains great truth, but leaves something to be desired by way of reconciling such a monumental epidemic as AIDS with His superintending sovereignty.

My "qualified no" option, then, picks up at this point, incorporating some truth from the second and third options while hopefully avoiding the logical and theological pitfalls we have seen. No, God did not intentionally and maliciously intervene to introduce this death-dealing virus into society. Yes, He allowed it, but only after having so structured His created order so that, ideally, this virus never should have emerged. The reason for its emergence and expansion was greatly facilitated by unnatural behaviors which, in the present order as it has been created by God, manifest the greater risk of introducing something harmful into that order than natural, healthy behaviors possess.

It may be suggested that my "qualified no" is really a "yes" to the question after all, since it was God's doing originally which would later contribute, in a sense, to the spread of the unnatural invading virus. In fact, although I would quarrel with that conclusion given God's original intent and His intense abomination of sickness, I consider this insight to be the thrust of truth motivating Romans 1:27 (and perhaps also 1 Corinthians 6:18's teaching that sexual sin in particular is directed against the body). Any message to sinful humanity that has at its foreground the grace of God, such as the book of Romans, necessarily must have as its background His wrath, not as a divine "I told you so" assigning blame and inducing shame, but echoing an urgent cry for repentance and intimating the judgment to come for the obstinate of heart. F.F. Bruce calls this wrath "that principle of moral retribution that must operate in a moral universe," a principle which, I submit, stands in rough correspondence to my "qualified no."² The apostle Paul would perhaps be more inclined than I to replace this notion of an impersonal principle operating today in the syndrome of AIDS with direct divine agency, though perhaps not. Those who cite Romans 1:27 as evi-

dence that AIDS is God's punishment of homosexuality tend to miss Paul's larger points, rendering their hasty traversal of the hermeneutical gap presumptuous. Paul was underlining that the real reason for God's wrath was the suppression of the truth, as he was casting *everyone* in the plight of a sinner meriting God's condemnation and in dire need of that righteousness that comes alone through the gospel of grace. Paul was not being self-righteous, as many are today in their denunciation of others' sin, but had as his only standard of righteousness that of God's very own. This is a standard of which *everyone* has fallen short, and attainable only through Christ by faith, thus forever precluding moralism.

Are homosexuals worthy of death? Yes. Just as the malicious and unmerciful are, which includes many in the Church, particularly in their behavior toward homosexuals and persons with AIDS. Even as we are *all* deserving of death for the sins which we have committed. Is God specifically punishing homosexuals through AIDS? No, although He did fashion the creation such that it is now more probable that an unnatural invader, like this virus, would generally spread more easily through unnatural ways of life such as promiscuity, intravenous drug use, bestiality or homosexuality than a natural way of life such as a committed relationship of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

This principle holds with greater consistency and plausibility when applied to other maladies than do those underlying principles of the earlier options. For example, option one, as mentioned, would probably concede little resemblance between excessive weight or heart disease due to overeating, and AIDS as caused by homosexuality. The former would be explained naturally, the latter by reference to God's direct action of judgment and punishment. The option I defend would see the same dynamic at work in both scenarios: In each case, as a matter of probability, the unnatural, sinful behavior tends in the direction of and enhances the vulnerability to sickness. It would be a valid inference from this principle to predict that feelings of animosity among Christians toward homosexuals would also tend to produce harmful long-term effects, psychologically, sociologically, physiologically, not to mention greatly undermine the Christian witness in the homosexual and lesbian communities. Such effects, too, would sound another call to repent, even as the somewhat recent riots in Los Angeles reverberate a clarion call for us all to renounce our bigotry and racism.

Similarly, option two's untenability based on the dubious correspondence between the sin and the sickness is replaced with a recognition that the same God who resides in heavenly places built this universe, investing it with those principles in which we can see spiritual truth. We plant a seed and watch it grow, knowing that God so created such a thing to illustrate for us lessons from the spiritual realm. Likewise, behaviors which are morally and spiritually debilitating have in the physical realm a similar detrimental tendency to promote sickness and disease. E. Stanley Jones analogously taught that the Way is, as it were, written into the universe. This parallel can exist without there being direct continuous intervention, as illustrated by the seed or AIDS. Thoughtful reflection suggests it is likely that the way He was at work in the life of AIDS, along with the other venereal diseases, was in so creating the world that such sicknesses never should have started or continued to spread, and probably would not have without unnatural, sinful behaviors.

I have somewhat blunted the distinction between righteousness and naturalness on one side, and between sinfulness and unnaturalness on the other. My intention in this regard should not, however, be construed as a strict equation of these. They are often the same,

but not always. Even natural desires can find illegitimate, unordained and, thus, sinful expression. As C.S. Lewis argued, evil is a distortion and perversion of the good. Nor am I advocating the dogmatic assumption frequently unquestioned among charismatic believers that every occurrence of sickness is always attributable to a specific, particular sin. It is precisely such strict formulations which encourage the automatic attribution of any instance of AIDS to homosexual behavior. It is then a small step to begin making the kinds of additional assumptions about the spiritual meaning of sickness which I have resisted. I only affirm that it is generally the case that righteousness tends in the direction of health, and sinfulness in the direction of sickness. The understandable human penchant to apprehend a more definitive meaning to sickness can be misleading. We can easily begin making false assumptions and drawing erroneous conclusions. It is to be remembered that the meaning of sickness is less intrinsic than derivative. AIDS' ultimate import, both generally as well as in particular cases, derives from the meaning with which God alone invests it.

It was common in Jesus' day to assume that an affliction implied a sin, thereby rendering any resultant pain rather beyond redemption. Jesus inverted such logic by affording sickness, in some instances, the opportunity to serve the most sublime purpose of all, namely, the glory of God. In John 9:1-3, the disciples asked Jesus about a man born blind, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Without entirely invalidating this assumption, Jesus certainly challenged it by his answer, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Then, in John 11:4, Jesus declared concerning Lazarus's illness, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

Options one and two provide a rationalization for Christians to look on afflicted homosexuals with contempt and judgment, rather than mercy and compassion. Rather than praying for their healing or reaching out to help, much less discerning any potential glory to God, we are inclined to consider them to be experiencing their just desserts. Rather than weeping over the tragedy of or hoping for the cure for AIDS, we callously, carelessly assert that justice is being rendered. Even if the claim is tenaciously retained that homosexuals richly deserve their suffering, should that stop our ears from hearing the desperate cries of the suffering and needy? How easily we forget that if we ourselves were to experience what we truly deserve for our sin, we would already be banished from the awesome presence of God forever—every one of us! In Jesus' day, it was the lepers who were supposed to be stricken by God with their affliction; and it was Jesus who dramatically reversed such twisted thinking by reaching out to touch and heal them, these broken, ostracized, marginalized people. Jesus spent much of His ministry healing those who had been cast off by society and especially by the religious. Today, is Jesus not speaking through the victims of AIDS and the others so often shunned by sinner and saint alike? The homeless, the prostitute, the drug addict, the prisoner? "When you have done it for the least of these, you have done it for Me."

A "qualified no" loosens the lid on this issue enough to allow room for mystery in this whole discussion. AIDS and every other disease, along with a plethora of other causes of acute pain and horrendous suffering in this world, constitute what philosophers call the problem of evil. Why does God, if He is able, not do something to alleviate or ameliorate this suffering? This challenge is perhaps the greatest of all obstacles to faith. Answering the

question of why there is evil and suffering and sickness in this world is never easy. Most attempts to claim that AIDS is God's punishment of homosexuals are a convenient way out for those who do not seriously struggle with the profundity and unmitigated horror of such a disease. They refuse to acknowledge God as the One who suffers with us most, as the One who sent His Son to die on the cross in our place. Rather, He is conceived more as the One who gleefully rains down additional suffering and dreaded diseases on the already weak and deluded. Such "easy answers" actually make trust in a good God and a loving Father difficult, if not practically impossible, for the emotionally sensitive and intellectually honest. A rejection of those easy, graceless answers means we are able to see the truth in the words of Scripture that indeed rain falls on both the just and on the unjust. Perfect justice is not accomplished in this broken, fallen world, but only in the world to come.

This leads to one important further point to consider. Resisting the temptation to assign exclusive or even primary importance to potentially misleading physical consequences, we become privy to an important insight into this matter of AIDS. Those who contract the disease of AIDS through homosexuality, and even die from it, are not necessarily worse off than those who cleverly or fortuitously avert the sickness for a lifetime. The former may not only simply regret having been "caught," but graphically learn the depth of their sickness and sin and come to God with broken, contrite hearts of repentance to find forgiveness in His grace, and even healing for their bodies or, just as miraculously, provision of sufficient grace to cope victoriously with sickness and to die a redeemed death. Like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, they may cry out for mercy and receive His promise to be with Him in paradise. Those who never come down with a sickness because of their sin, in contrast, may continue to go miserably on their way, their physical health intact but their spiritual health ebbing away. Their souls could be dying even as their bodies are strong, while the souls may be flourishing of those whose bodies are withering away. John Wesley described the latter in a journal entry from February, 1753, "Three or four weeks ago he fell ill of a fever, and was for a while in heaviness of soul. Last week all his doubts and fears vanished; and as he grew weaker in body, he grew stronger in faith. This morning he expressed an hope full of immortality, and in the afternoon went to God."³ The relationship between the spiritual and physical realms is profound and, sometimes, paradoxical.⁴

Notes

1. Cited by H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), p. 262.
2. F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), p. 78.
3. John Wesley, *Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986; reprint of the 1872 edition), 2:280.
4. I would like to thank Ginger Asel, Stuart Noell, and Jerry Walls for their suggestive, insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Book Reviews

Allen, Leslie C. *Ezekiel 20–48*, *Word Biblical Commentary* 29, Dallas: Word Books, 1990. xxviii

The name Leslie Allen has long been associated with excellence in evangelical scholarship, and this volume will do nothing to diminish his reputation. Though this volume is the companion to W. H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19* in the same series, Allen takes a different tack than Brownlee. Using rhetorical, form, and redaction criticism as his main exegetical tools, Allen demonstrates the theological power of the historical critical method for those who confess allegiance to the inspired text.

The commentary proper divides Ezekiel 20–48 into twenty-eight sections, including a brief introduction to Ezekiel's program for restoration. Each unit follows the familiar *Word* format of bibliography, translation, notes, form/structure/setting, comment and explanation. The first three sections are self-explanatory; the notes are extensive and helpful for those struggling with the Hebrew text (both critically and philologically). The discussion of Form/Structure/Setting typically focuses on the rhetorical "unity" of the pericope, though Allen is not adverse to see redactional activity as the means by which rhetorical unity is achieved where so necessitated by the evidence (see, e.g., his discussion of Ezek. 20:1–44). There is less attention paid to the form-critical structure of the extant text than some would like; such readers are referred to R. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). The language of "secondary addition" or "later redactional expansion" is less likely to be found here than one might expect (see, e.g., 21:15, 18a; 23:4b, 5b, 7b, 25b, etc.). Allen is also more likely to posit the activity of Ezekiel the prophet in the redactional/compositional activity which gave birth to the book (see p. xxvi) while conceding the presence of a school of disciples during the exile who also played a role in this process.

The Comment section provides an opportunity for verse-by-verse and section-by-section exposition, whereas the Explanation yields a synthetic interpretation of the pericope as a whole, frequently with reference to the NT.

This is an outstanding commentary that will repay careful study by its readers. In my judgment, it ranks with W. Zimmerli's two volumes in the *Hermeneia* series as the best available studies of these chapters. (Many, of course, await the completion of M. Greenberg's two-volume set in the Anchor Bible; this will give the student of the OT a remarkably rich resource for the study of Ezekiel). Obviously, interpreters will find points of dispute with Allen, and so the rehearsal of a litany of disagreements would hardly be helpful. Nonetheless, I was least pleased with his work on two sections: chapter 23 and chapters 40–48. The former—perhaps the best OT example of revi-

sionistic historiography—is as thoroughly negative as any text in the OT. Allen sees three lessons in the chapter: to remind the people that Egypt is the enemy of the people, that the Northern Kingdom's flirtation with Assyria led to catastrophe, to proclaim that Judah's turning from the hand of Yahweh was to fall into the hand of Yahweh. But there is no theological discussion of the total absence of grace in the chapter (compare the use of 20:32-44 to "cap" the negative polemic of 20:1-31) and the question that this raises: Can the Gospel ever be bad news without good news? With respect to Ezekiel 40-48, Allen asks

To some extent at least they were presumably presented as normative for the future. Yet the post-exilic community, even adoption of their rulings was within its power, found other models for its worship, while the different orientation of the Christian faith has left these chapters outdated. Must one relegate them to a drawer of lost hopes and disappointed dreams, like faded photographs? (p. 214)

In fact the answer should be "Yes." Ezekiel and his disciples proclaimed a program for the restored community that was ultimately rejected in favor of the Priestly program now reflected in the Pentateuch. But Allen tries to skirt this conclusion in favor of a subsequent symbolic reading of these institutions. This seems to me not to cohere with a sober historical method of interpretation.

But these disagreements aside, this is an outstanding commentary, one of the strongest in the series, and well worth owning by serious students of the OT.

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Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Trans. Margaret Kohl from the German *Der Geist des Lebens: Eine Ganzheitliche Pneumatologie*.

For years, Jürgen Moltmann has been one of the most interesting—and interested—theologians on the world stage. Often in America, perhaps more clergy, seminarians and laity have heard Moltmann speak than any other German theologian. Moltmann continues to take as many cues from the life of Christians in America and Europe as he gives clues to them for understanding our faith. Moltmann's mind and Christian heart are large and amaze the reader by the diversity not only of the knowledge but of the caring they contain. As a former student of the "up-to-date" Paul Tillich, I am still amazed at a theologian who quotes the Rastafarian singer, Bob Marley (at the very end), and who clings to an honestly orthodox theology while making liberation thought his touch stone and responsible ecology his concern. Along the way Moltmann affirms feminism, feminist theology, the peace and Greenpeace movements and self-help groups for single-parents, the divorced, and people with Aids. Even more amazingly, he does this not by simple assertion but by showing how the nature of the church based in a fuller, more complete *pneumatology* demands such

affirmation.

Some years ago, I taught Systematic Theology in seminary using Moltmann's earlier works, and found myself wishing for a thorough exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit analogous to Paul Tillich's *Life and the Spirit*, part IV of the *Systematic Theology* (1963). Now in Moltmann's fourth volume of *Systematics*, I have it. It was worth waiting for! Tillich is mentioned only seven times in 358 pages but the conception, and the basic idea of *The Spirit of Life* is closer to that of Tillich than to any other predecessor or influence. This by no means is to say Moltmann is derivative of Tillich any more than he is from Barth or Luther or John Wesley, all of whom he quotes and dialogues with. It is to say that Moltmann, like Tillich, draws from that long and vital tradition that treats of the Spirit of Life in German and other European philosophy and theology. To say that what we experience every day as the spirit of life is the Spirit of God is to voice a prehension that roots deep in the Nineteenth Century and runs back to the work of Hegel, Schelling, Fichte and perhaps most in Johann Georg Hamann, in the eighteenth. Lessing (d. 1781) is mentioned only three times in this volume, yet Moltmann's freedom from bias, tolerance and continual urging of persons to love without prejudice are reminiscent of Lessing. The author's contemporary and sincere concern for the care of the earth that persons have neglected surely owes something to German Romanticism with its love of nature and its open ear for hearing the movement of The Spirit in an overly rationalized world. All this is but to say that reading Moltmann is an intellectual and emotional feast, not unlike the crowded tables set by Paul Tillich, yet much more existential, more colorful and real, than the abstractions Tillich regularly offers us.

To simply list the courageous new ideas and suggestions made by Moltmann in this work would take considerable time. Perhaps the most audacious—and the most symbolic of his suggested reconstruction of our confession of The Spirit—is his closely reasoned argument that the addition of the Filioque to the Nicene Creed is superfluous, unnecessary and is even pernicious in its historical effects (pp. 306-307). Moltmann refers to this problem under several rubrics, beginning in the introduction (p.1) and ends the book with his conclusions. He definitely comes down on the side of the Orthodox Theologians:

In the light of his (Spirit's) origin, he is subordinated to The Son; and it is consequently impossible for him to appear in any other way in the economy of salvation. The relationships between The Son and The Spirit can then no longer be understood as reciprocal relationships. The way always leads from The Son to The Spirit, no longer from The Spirit to The Son." (p. 306-307).

I suspect that Moltmann is correct, and applaud his insight not only for pneumatology but for Ecumenism. The filioque has divided the church since 1054; perhaps a willingness to discuss a new understanding could bring East and West in Christianity closer to that unity that is our Catholic hope.

Two other vital areas opened up by Moltmann in this volume are Spirit-Christology (another reminder of Tillich), beginning on p. 60 and an intense and open dialogue with the Wesleyan tradition involving sanctification (chapter VIII) and the Contemporary Pentecostal tradition concerning the variety of gifts of the Spirit experienced by Pentecostals. Moltmann affirms the "Charismatics" of this and every age, saying:

The *whole* of life, and *every* life in faith is charismatic, for The Spirit is 'poured out upon all flesh' to quicken it. (p.182)

No other important Protestant teacher offers the mainline churches a better platform on which to attempt to build an ecumenical consensus with the "Evangelicals" of America than Moltmann. Affirming those who pursue holiness and those in whom signs and wonders so often occur, he shows both Evangelicals and mainline Protestants—and Eastern and Western Christians—that we need one another and that we belong together so as to save our sisters and brothers and to redeem and restore the battered world on which we all live.

The Spirit of Life is highly recommended reading for clergy, professors and laity.

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Baldwin Jr., Lewis V. *There Is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991. 339 pages.

Lewis Baldwin is an associate professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University, an African American, a Southerner, and an ordained Baptist minister. This first book on King joins a number of Baldwin's articles on King, as well as on slave religious culture. He has written two other books and a companion volume to this work, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).

With other African-American scholars, Baldwin contends that King has been interpreted against the background of white intellectual tradition, relegating his own cultural experience to the margins, as if:

the black church and the larger black community are not healthy and vital contexts for the origin of intellectual ideas regarding theology and social change.¹

Against this misunderstanding, Baldwin claims that Southern Black² experience and the Black Church provided King with his deepest norms, by which he tested and appropriated Reinhold Niebuhr, Personalism, Gandhian pacifism, and the social gospel of Rauschenbusch. In this effort, Baldwin's thesis functions as an alternative to John J. Ansbro's *The Making of a Mind*,³ and William D. Watley's *Roots of Resistance*.⁴ Ansbro's focus was on King's appropriation of the "classical" western intellectual tradition represented by Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Tillich, Weiman, and the Boston Personalists, Brightman and DeWolfe. Watley's treatment of King's intellectual resources grants a certain foundational status to the Black Christian tradition alongside Personalism and Evangelical liberalism, but defines his ethic as "developing" and "maturing" outside that context. Baldwin contends that the Black gospel tradition provided King with enduring norms that were not significantly changed or challenged by other intellectual streams of thought. The author seeks not to chronicle King's life and intellectual odyssey, but to identify three domi-

nant themes that emerge from Black Southern experience.

First is the *sense of Southern identity*. This sense of place in a Southern context includes a sense of purpose and commitment toward that region. In the chapter titled "Cast Down Your Bucket," Baldwin examines the socio-cultural significance of eating, shared religious values, the joy in humor and music, the character of black middle-class Atlanta, and the effects of poverty and segregation. Meal sharing is seen as a ritualistic expression of celebration and economic security, and King's passion for Southern cooking is set in a communal context of solidarity with the region. The rich humor and wit of Southern Blacks is interpreted as a stubborn refusal to be victimized by white society; laughter is a shared language of hopeful protest against the hardship of oppressed existence. Likewise, the love of music demonstrates a festiveness toward life, a shared expression of art and celebration. Baldwin also notes the natural resources of the Southern context, noting that the geographic wealth of the region was at once a source of plenty and of oppression, since "the beauty of the South and its abundance of untapped resources" were categorically exploited by whites at the expense of blacks. King saw the inclusion of Blacks in the vision of the new industrial South as a moral and economic necessity in defeating segregation.

King's peculiarly Southern identity shaped his agenda as well as personal decisions. He married a Southern woman, surrounded himself by Southerners while in Boston, and returned to the South for his ministry. Baldwin concludes that the paradox of Southern identity as both nurturing and hostile provided the heart of King's dialectical understanding of community and non-community.

The second theme is the *sense of community* revolving around family life, church experience, and the neighborhood of Auburn Avenue. In "Walk Together Children," Baldwin examines King's complex inheritance of community values of discipline, responsibility, spirituality, and the drive for educational excellence. The middle-class neighborhood of Auburn Avenue is presented as a cohesive community, committed to self-help and public accountability. In the discussion of extended family life, the effects of both Martin's and Coretta's family ties are identified as constitutive elements of King's own communal commitments. The author provides insight into the historical role of the grandmother as the bearer of oral history during the days of slavery, providing a sense of continuous kinship. The examination of King's teachings (in sermons and church school) considers his own relationship to Coretta and to his children, concluding that King understood the family as a communal entity. In King's life, family was one of the two figural institutions in the liberation and survival of African Americans. The other primary role is attributed to the Black Church.

Christian optimism, the third thematic consideration, is the deep faith in God's providence. Rooted in early slave culture, Christian optimism created King's vision of the Beloved Community. The book title and chapter headings come from slave spirituals, supporting Baldwin's thesis that the Black Church was the single most important intellectual source for King. In "How I Got Over," the Black Church is identified as the single most important source for King's faith, providing him with both vision and method to challenge social injustice. Baldwin traces the particular prophetic tradition of Christianity that emerged when the first Africans were confronted with a gospel of love at the hands of oppressive white Christians. He argues that the experience of oppression produced a partic-

ular manifestation of Christianity, a unique blend of intense spirituality and a commitment for social justice. Standing in a long line of ministers, King was shaped by the power of Black oratory, slave spirituals, and gospel music. Of particular interest is King's own early pastoral experience, the "vision in the kitchen," and the spiritual resources of prayer and song that energized the Civil Rights movement. This chapter is key to Baldwin's understanding of King's intellectual resources. He concludes that the church is still the most autonomous and resourceful institution in the African-American community, and that future liberation initiatives must be founded on this legacy.

Additional chapters set King in the historic streams of Black Messianism and Black preachers. In "Up You Mighty Race," Baldwin offers a historical overview of Black Messianic thought in America. Against this legacy, Baldwin examines points of comparison and contrast with a number of nineteenth-century advocates of the Black Messianic vision as they relate to King's image of the Beloved Community. Discussing the role of King as a black Messianic figure, he notes that such identification among followers is to some degree natural and beneficial. But, while strong symbolic leadership is essential to the liberation of blacks, Baldwin cautions against absolutizing one figure as a norm for the future of African-American liberation:

Most black Americans have not progressed beyond the point of calling on a Martin Luther King, Jr., to save them. King's philosophy and methods are still widely accepted as the only moral and practical way to liberation. Black America's models for a liberation ethic will not be significantly enlarged as long as such a perception remains dominant within its ranks. (p. 252)

Finally, Baldwin considers King's own pastoral ministry. In "Standing In The Shoes of John," the author considers the prophetic, priestly, and pastoral elements of the Dexter Avenue ministry. Setting King in the context of his pastoral colleagues, Baldwin concludes that he was successful in balancing the three interdependent functions. King's own rhetorical style and pulpit giants establish him firmly in the Black preaching tradition.⁵ Baldwin also considers King's ecumenicity and his collegial style, basing much of his information on private interviews with King's buddy, Philip Lenud.

Baldwin's style is clear and compelling. His own Afrocentric view is implied rather than argued. The text is accessible to the general reader, free of academic jargon, lengthy theological discourse, or polemic (although the numerous footnotes carry the weight of warrants and a certain amount of polemic). The editorial decision to eliminate a bibliography may be unfortunate. While there are a number of excellent bibliographies on King that would not need duplication, the literature about early slave culture is figural to Baldwin's work and deserves to be cited beyond footnotes. Readers interested in this resource are encouraged to locate Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion. The "Invisible Institution" of the Antebellum South*; Bayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*; Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made*; and Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture*; just to name a few. Baldwin's approach is based on the premise that slave culture shaped the distinctive character of the contemporary Black Church. I would recommend that readers start with Chapter 3, "How I Got Over," to establish this critical foundation. Those who only have time to read one or

two chapters are advised to read this chapter and Chapter 4, "Up You Mighty Race," which ties the Black Church to the Messianic tradition.

The book provides a brilliant interpretation of the meaning and significance of the cultural tradition of King. Baldwin provides an Archimedian point of reference for understanding the broader development of King within this very specific framework of Southern Black culture, and in this way has contributed decisively to King scholarship. The book takes the symbolic universe of a particular region seriously and demonstrates its definitive influence upon the theology and praxis of all of King's endeavors.

Readers will want to keep Baldwin's own interpretation of King's theological norms clearly in mind, however. The controlling theological norms are not only distinct from assumed white theological claims of personal salvation, but are also distinct from conservative and literalist traditions in the faith of both white and black Christians. First, King's concept of the personal God is one of a loving, active, immanent deity who works in history through the power of redemptive love. Though personal, King's God is not private, but actively involved in social structures and processes to bring about transformation. Second, this God does not play favorites, but values all human beings as having worth and dignity endowed by the Creator. In the negative sense, King's theological claims are contrary to those that emphasize either God's wrath, God's detachment from the social sphere, or God's favoring of one group over another. With these two norms in view, the book engages in an excellent critical discussion of the theological issues involved in King's appropriation of EuroAmerican philosophy and theology. Baldwin demonstrates his theological expertise in his analysis of King's sermons, continually clarifying the analytical power of these religious-cultural norms. Clearly, when Baldwin calls for an appropriation of the theological genius of King and the Black Church, it is this particular theological interpretation he advances. Baldwin establishes King's theological agenda as one which includes liberation as a means toward the ultimate goal of the Beloved Community.

White readers, especially those from parts outside the South, will be introduced to the rich and complex world of King's particular context. For many, the synthesis of family life, community commitment, aesthetic depth, and religious ethos that Baldwin presents as normative black Southern life will strike a chord of profound wonder. For those who have come to identify King with the white Liberal Protestant tradition, the uniqueness of African American religious culture will be striking. Contrary to what whites may interpret from King's own "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,"⁶ his religious pilgrimage did not begin in Boston with his introduction to Nietzsche, Niebuhr, Heidegger and Hegel. King's own interpretation suggests that his concept of the *imago dei*, and the Christian norms of neighbor love were grounded in the gospel of the Black Church. King was no theological tabula rasa, absorbing the norms of EuroAmerican philosophy. Rather, his own theological norms of a personal God and the dignity and worth of all persons found a certain formal philosophical ground in EuroAmerican tradition. Baldwin does not oppose these traditions, since the reality of being African and American is a continuing double consciousness, the "twoness" articulated by W.E.B. DuBois.⁷ For all white pastors, seminarians, and scholars, ignorance of this dynamic is ethically and intellectually irresponsible. Baldwin's understanding of King is an essential hermeneutic key.

Women readers, womanists and feminists alike, will appreciate the unflinching evalua-

tion of King's sexism,⁸ how it distorted Coretta's life and hampered the Civil Rights Movement itself. Baldwin is sensitive to the role of women in King's life, avoiding both matriarchal or romantic models. The influence of wives, mothers, and grandmothers is treated with admirable evenhandedness. The author's insistence on the communal life of family and church as primary environments of ethical and moral development avoids both valorization of the "strong Black woman" as well as sentimental trivialization. I, for one, regret the slight attention given to Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, in the extensive treatment of nineteenth century Black Messianism. Lack of ordination or church leadership should not exclude these courageous women who spoke and acted on behalf of full human freedom. Baldwin's own argument against a male-dominated church would be enhanced by more emphasis on this womanist heritage.

Womanists and feminists may not be so optimistic as Baldwin about the appropriation of King's cultural roots in the Black Church. Although Baldwin criticizes the sexism of King and the Black Church, he continues to use them as models for the present. For many women, African American and otherwise, a deep hermeneutic of suspicion lingers whenever a hierarchical male model (that has rendered them invisible and forgotten) is promoted. A call to racial solidarity continues to overlook the complex connections between sexism, capitalism, and racism. The womanist critique of African-American patriarchy by Hooks, Davis, Cannon, and Brantl are assumed rather than articulated by Baldwin. Those who do not understand Baldwin's use of King's theological norms will be suspicious of his demand that liberation efforts be grounded in the Black Church. In his discussion of potential barriers to liberation (pp. 268-272), Baldwin neglects to articulate how King's own theological norms may serve as a corrective to eradicate patriarchal interpretations of African-American faith.

For those in the African-American scholarly tradition, Baldwin's thesis maintains the view of such Black theological luminaries as James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, and C. Eric Lincoln, claiming that Black Christianity is a distinctive model of faith and praxis. With a different constellation of stories, faith claims, and eschatological visions, it is not just a different hued version of Euro-American faith. Baldwin's distinction is his articulation of King's cultural context as a hermeneutic lens through which the history and the future of liberation may be critically interpreted. With clarity and adeptness, he blends slave history, Afrocentric cultural symbols, and critical Black theology into a dynamic force. Such an energetic synthesis provides a necessary constructive framework for future African-American liberation.

However, Baldwin's conclusions regarding the moral superiority of this cultural uniqueness may spark some debate. He claims that:

Despite its many shortcomings, black America is still in a better moral and spiritual position than white America to serve as a vanguard in the human struggle for wholeness and harmony. This fact should be accepted with humility and a deep sense of collective responsibility....¹⁰

Such was King's own understanding; and one criticized by Cornel West as "weak exceptionalist" assertions of African-American superiority based on sociological claims of cultural values or religious claims of redemptive suffering.¹¹ The distinction is subtle, but there is a

difference between claiming that certain moral positions are superior and that certain communities holding those claims are better than other communities. It is unclear whether Baldwin claims the moral or the epistemological advantage to advance his argument for collective responsibility. One danger in making the moral claim is the objectification of "the other" as an object of redemption, a mistake that white Christians made with regard to African slaves. Another critique of the moral superiority argument comes from feminists and womanists: to what degree can one sexist tradition be morally superior to another?

Unfortunately, the moral superiority argument raises the question of the moral fibre of King himself. Clearly, the epistemological argument supports Baldwin's thesis of cultural uniqueness, King's epistemology of suffering, and womanists' more thorough perspectives on social location. The epistemological argument is also more compatible with the theological norms proposed by Baldwin, particularly the claim of radical human worth.

Baldwin sets King within the broad tradition of Black Messianism, extending beyond its Christian expression, to include Black Nationalism. Baldwin's mandate for liberation based in the Black Church may not address those voices, or those who have abandoned the church as an agent of social and political change. As James Cone points out in his recent book, *Martin & Malcolm & America*:

Because of Malcolm's unrestrained critique of Christianity and uncritical devotion to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, white Christians ignored him and black Christians paid too little attention to his critique of their faith...I do not think anyone can be a real Christian in America today, or perhaps anywhere else, without incorporating Malcolm's race critique into his or her thinking about the religion of Jesus.¹²

African-American Christians, along with white Christians, will have to ask hard questions about the peculiar association of the Christian tradition with capitalism and militarism as well as sexism. While the liberation efforts may need to be associated with the Black Church, critiques from African-American Marxists, Muslims, and Jews will be necessary for a truly inclusive vision of the Beloved Community. Indeed, Baldwin has discerned the theological norms in King's heritage as those which would be most inclusive and transformative. The divine personality of God, and the claim of human dignity will continue to serve as critical norms for the tasks of interfaith dialogue and an internal critique of Christian faith and praxis. While such theological norms will provide criteria for those within religiously oriented frameworks, the problem of the growing number of African Americans who have abandoned "the spiritual values and emotive qualities of their heritage" (p. 271) to pursue American middle-class status will not be easily resolved by theological standards.

With regard to Black pastors, lack of theological education continues to frustrate widespread appropriation of liberation theologies, demanding that much of the task is pedagogical rather than philosophical. Baldwin does not, however, add to the lamentations of other scholars in this regard. His location of critical theological norms within the Black Church offers a way to liberate Black Theology from its academic captivity.

Lewis Baldwin has offered a unique interpretation of King's own cultural identity that enhances the possibilities for "keeping the dream alive." Baldwin weaves together the worldview of slave culture, the vibrancy of southern experience, and the social ethos of

African-American Christianity with astonishing talent. While unabashedly respectful of King, Baldwin is not uncritical. Amidst a recent spate of polemic literature, Baldwin has chosen neither to defend a myth, nor to discount King's contributions. He shows us the ordinary man within extraordinary history, without reducing King's cultural identity to mere anecdotal landscape for heroic drama. Indeed, Baldwin would argue, to see King as a product of the Black Christian South, is to understand the essence of his greatness.

Notes

1. *There Is a Balm in Gilead*, p. 3.
2. Baldwin uses the term "Black" almost exclusively and my references to Baldwin's work reflect that vocabulary.
3. John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982).
4. William D. Watley, *Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethic of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985).
5. Readers will note that the book went to press just prior to publicity regarding alleged academic and homiletic plagiarism. They will not find discussion of this issue in this book.
6. *In Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 135-142.
7. W.E.B. DeBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett, 1970), pp.16-17.
8. *There Is a Balm in Gilead*, pp. 132-133 and 268-270.
9. For Womanist critiques of the triple oppression of sexism/racism/classism, see Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Katie Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981).
10. *There Is A Balm In Gilead*, p. 272.
11. Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance!* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 70-78.
12. James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or A Nightmare* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), p. 296.

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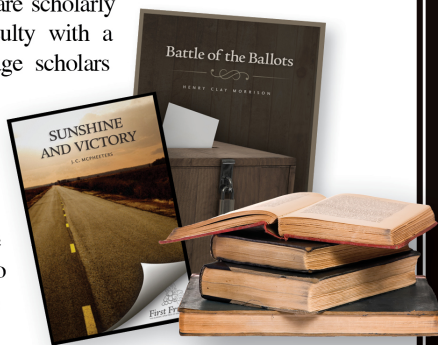
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