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DIDASKALIA

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“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching (Διδασκαλία)...”

— 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

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From the Guest Editor

It has been a longtime aspiration of mine to get some of the best emerging theologians and philosophers in Canada to address the subject of political theology. From that effort, what follows is a substantial presentation on many subjects that should appeal to our readers. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Patrick Franklin, the General Editor of *Didaskalia*, and to the editorial team (Russell and Shannon Doerksen), not only for their valuable support and help but also for this honor.

The first article was written by Stanley Porter (PhD, Sheffield) and Hughson Ong (PhD, McMaster), the President and an instructor at McMaster Divinity College. It asks whether a political theology can be legitimately rooted in the New Testament. They first argue that, since it is problematic to establish any Christian political theology from the Old Testament, it must be established from the New. Accordingly, Porter and Ong examine several key texts commonly used in developing a political theology (e.g., Sermon on the Mount, Pauline empire texts, household codes, Romans 13, and 1 Peter 2) and question their sufficiency. They conclude with some reflections about how Christian scholars can move forward, given the reality that there is no fully adequate biblical foundation for political theology.

The second article is by H. C. Hillier (PhD, Toronto), an instructor at Wilfrid Laurier University. Hillier questions the Christian support of liberal tolerance through criticisms raised by the Marxist-Lacanian philosopher and social critic Slavoj Žižek. Beginning by distilling the rationale for a liberal theory of tolerance, he then turns to the challenge Žižek poses. The belief that ethno-religious-cultural tolerance is the solution to a multitude of contemporary political problems presents an essentialist view of other cultures and misses the more central sociopolitical reasons for these problems. Instead, Žižek articulates a Lacanian interpretation of the biblical command to “love thy neighbor” as a more promising solution to sociopolitical conflict. In conclusion, Hillier raises some critical questions about

Zizek's criticism of liberal tolerance, but finally determines that Christian thinkers ought to take Zizek's political theology seriously. It reveals the inherently corrupting impact of liberal theory for Christianity, robbing it of its radical core and critical potency in the world.

Third, Andrew Atkinson (PhD, Wilfrid Laurier), an instructor at Wilfrid Laurier University, writes a fascinating article that critiques Zizek's representation of the autistic person as the "subject at zero-level" and the "zero-point" of subjectivity. Zizek uses this metaphor politically, as the completely privatized subjective individual excluded from its own substance as a political animal (e.g., the suicide bomber). Atkinson argues that Zizek's misreading of the autistic subject, rooted in a Cartesian division of matter and psyche, detracts from our regarding such persons as being in the image of God. Drawing from literature, biography, film, psychoanalysis theory, and theological philosophy, Atkinson challenges Zizek and affirms the autistic person as fully human.

Fourth, Adrian E. V. Langdon (PhD, McGill), an instructor at Nipissing and Laurentian Universities, examines whether Christian political theology can develop a better foundation of nature and so address our contemporary ecological crisis, through the theological anthropologies of Bonhoeffer and Barth. After outlining various specific charges against Christianity regarding its view on nature, such as the transcendent God as separate from nature and the biblical command for humans to have dominion over the earth, Langdon sets to show how theological anthropology needs to account for both human embodiment and embeddedness by expanding Bonhoeffer's concept of the *imago Dei* as *analogia relationis* to include non-human entities. Langdon also draws upon Barth's exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 in his *Church Dogmatics* to address some of the problems he finds in Bonhoeffer's account; this allows one to move from embodiment towards embeddedness. In the end, Langdon skillfully and impressively expands the I-Thou dialogue to suggest a new foundation for a Christian theology of nature.

Fifth, Jason C. Robinson (PhD, Guelph), an instructor at York and Wilfrid Laurier Universities, presents an intriguing essay on the failure of modern science to embrace imagination and transcendence. Through discussing the ideas of the philosopher Hans-George Gadamer, Robinson argues that, while imagination is encouraged at the start of the scientific process, in order to present only pure objective facts, it is zealously pushed aside as a contamination shortly thereafter. Robinson then turns to Gadamer's philosophical appeal for transcendence. This appeal begins with religion. Since humanity needs more than the scientific method to survive, religion has traditionally been the vehicle for experiencing transcendence. This raises the importance of hermeneutics in interpersonal and interreligious dialogue for Gadamer. Without such dialogue, science loses its imagination; in its reductionist search for objective facts science begins with exclusion rather than inclusion. Dialogue, however, seeks for openness to diverse sources of knowledge and requires vulnerability and humility regarding the search for truth.

Our unique sixth essay comes from a triad of PhD candidates at the Toronto School of Theology: Michael Buttrey, Matthew Eaton and Nicholas Olkovich. Presented first at the Canadian Theological Society's 2015 Annual Meeting, Buttrey et al. critically engage the political theology of William Cavanaugh through the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas and Bernard Lonergan. Buttrey begins by connecting Cavanaugh's criticism of the modern theory of religion to his ecclesiology regarding public engagement (specifically in societies characterized by modernist church-state separation in legislation and jurisprudence). In response, Eaton challenges what he regards as Christian triumphalism and neo-Augustinianism in Cavanaugh and draws upon Lévinas's ethical theory to support a politics from weakness. Eaton argues that, contrary to Cavanaugh, a more nuanced view of the relationship between the church and other groups within a society is required; moreover, the morality of church-state engagements is more complex than Cavanaugh perceives. Next, Olkovich argues that while both Cavanaugh and Lonergan share some commonalities regarding their critiques of modernity, ultimately Cavanaugh's ideas create tension with the Catholic doctrines of salvation and natural law as

expressed by Lonergan. In conclusion, Buttrey responds to these criticisms, both defending Cavanaugh and admitting his apparent incompatibility with these two other intellectual giants.

Seventh, Robert Dean (ThD, Toronto), an instructor at Tyn-dale Seminary, argues that one can better understand the renowned American theologian Stanley Hauerwas's theology of preaching by placing it within his wider political theology. Contrary to other examples of political preaching today, such as apologetics confined by the rules of modernity or politicking for a particular party/person, Dean argues that Hauerwas understands both the church and the act of preaching to be political in nature. Dean shows how Hauerwas's theology liberates today's preachers from the power of modern subjectivity (i.e., preaching to be relevant to congregations and/or preaching from the preacher's own subjectivity). For Hauerwas, preaching is tied to Scripture, not the preacher or parish; and the preacher's job is to show how the world is transformed by the gospel, not to make the gospel relevant to the world. Additionally, preaching liberates the preacher from being bound to modern emotivism and academic biblical criticism. Only within the political community of the church does Scripture become holy and comprehensible.

In our last essay, Patrick Franklin (PhD, McMaster Divinity College), Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics at Providence Seminary and General Editor of *Didaskalia*, draws upon missionary-pastor-theologian Lesslie Newbigin to examine the political nature of the church as a missional community, in light of challenges the church faces in late modern (and postmodern) culture. After summarizing some of Newbigin's central reflections about western culture, Franklin presents four key elements of Newbigin's theology of mission: the significance of election as being called to bless the nations, the nature of conversion as personal but not individualistic, the trinitarian structure and orientation of mission (against human models of marketing and campaigning), and the importance of discipleship over mere numerical growth. Franklin concludes his exposition of Newbigin by presenting two suggestive themes for missional ecclesiology: the "missionary congregation" and the "congregation as the hermeneutic

of the gospel.” This section provides a wonderful conclusion to this whole issue, reminding the reader that the church is centered around the importance of relationships, the proclamation of the lordship of Christ (compelling the church to be public), a clear sense of calling in which all believers are missionaries, and an awareness of being a global church working toward loving God and neighbour at home and abroad.

It is my hope that as we finish a year characterized by unprecedented national and global political events, theologians and philosophers can offer innovative insights and answers to these challenges, revealing the power of a mind illuminated by faith.

Soli Deo Gloria

Chad Hillier, PhD, Guest Editor

Wilfrid Laurier University

The New Testament and Political Theology

Stanely E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Introduction

In a recent issue of the *United Church Observer*—the same issue that has a boxed story on Wicca (we leave our readers to figure that out)—there was a story in the regular column, “Currents,” entitled, “Political Theology: Should Church and State Mix?”¹ The article is admittedly short, and is not designed to offer a substantial analysis of the topic. What it offers is a critique of those who believe that church and politics should not mix, in other words, that the two entities need to be separated, assuming that that the Bible is the cause of the church’s inappropriate involvement in politics. (Moral injustices in society are said by some to be the result of the Bible.²) As a result, there are two responses found within both the church and the society in general regarding this issue: partisanship or avoidance. Both responses are shunned for an endorsement of the need to become informed in the area of political theology as a means of helping congregations become grounded in their political activities. Suggested topics for investigation are “the relationship between politics and theology, examining the dynamics of power, considering political interpretations of the Bible, and analyzing theological assumptions made by leaders and their policies.”³ The author concludes that theology and politics belong and should belong together, because they both talk about “values.” There are several things to note from this article.

1 Trisha Elliott, “Political Theology: Should Church and State Mix?” *The United Church Observer* NS 79.3, October 2015, 43.

2 Here is a common argument often brought up against the Bible: “I certainly don’t want to live in a nation that believes rape is okay, that women should be subservient to men, that slavery is fine, and that racism is good” (see <http://www.debate.org/opinions/should-church-and-state-be-separated>).

3 Elliott, “Political Theology,” 43.

The first is that there are indeed people, at least within United Church circles (and the readers of their magazine), who are interested in political theology. The second is that there is no clear definition of what political theology is. A third is the assumption that political theology is something that Christians should be interested in. The fourth and last is that there is the assumption that the Bible is clear on providing the foundation for political theology. Apart from the first, each of the others is highly problematic.

This leads to the purpose of this article. This article begins by asking the question of what political theology is, at least within the framework of New Testament studies, and then turns to the New Testament basis regarding what might be termed political theology. We conclude with some observations regarding how the New Testament relates to political theology.

What Is Political Theology?

The first question that must be asked is, “what exactly is political theology?” This must be asked if for no other reason than, if we do not know what it is, we will find it more difficult to see what its relationship to the New Testament is, in other words, whether there is a foundation for political theology in the New Testament. Here is where the problem begins. Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) is arguably the founding figure of modern notions of political theology. He wrote works of importance from the 1920s to 1930s during Weimar Germany, but also lived to see and, in some ways, welcome (unfortunately) the rise of National Socialism and its destructiveness, not dying until 1985. In his important *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, in particular in his chapter entitled “Political Theology,” originally written in 1922, Schmitt lays out his view of political theology.⁴ The basis of it seems to be that “the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver,”⁵ and this leads to the systematically organized state as a necessity for social order (the only exception he notes is jurisprudence, which he considers analogous to the miracle

4 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), esp. 36-52. See also the introduction by George Schwab (pp. xi-xxvi).

5 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

in theology). Other theological concepts are included in his discussion in this chapter—such as God, the voice of God, the conception of God, the Trinity, and references to Calvinist dogma, among other notions. One thing that is clearly missing, however, is any reference to any passage in the Bible. The term “political theology” is used in a wide variety of theological and even non-theological circles, but without a substantive agreed-upon definition, other than the fact that it is concerned with politics and the like and theology and the like. This is an unsatisfactory definition.⁶ As a result, there have been varying definitions of political theology. Schmitt’s approach is sociological, rather than theological, concerned with how theological ideas might be transferred to the social realm of politics. Others take a view that is more theological in orientation, interpreting political life through theological categories to provide legitimation for them (e.g., traditional Lutheranism and its view of two kingdoms). There is a third group that is more activist in nature, which assumes that Christian activism is the legitimate response to revelation, including taking direct political action (as has Liberation Theology).⁷ No doubt some of those groups invoke the Bible as warrant for Christian activism, as occasion arises and as opportunity presents itself. However, this third group is not at the forefront.

The New Testament Basis of Political Theology

Without the issue of a definition of political theology settled—which does present problems for this discussion, but cannot be resolved here—we now turn to the Bible, in particular the New Testament, to see if there is biblical warrant for political theology. Before examining the New Testament evidence, we must pause to clarify why we are not examining the Old Testament as well. There are a number of difficulties in using the Old Testament to provide the basis of a Christian ethic, including one that might involve politics. There is a tendency in contemporary theology to treat the Old Testament as

6 See Kinga Marulewska, “Schmitt’s Political Theology as a Methodological Approach,” in *What Do Ideas Do?*, ed. A. Lisiak and N. Smolenski (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows’ Conferences vol. 33, 2014). No pages. Online: <http://www.iwm.at/publications/visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-33/>

7 Marulewska, “Schmitt’s Political Theology,” par. 6, ll. 14-20.

if it were to be interpreted in much the same way as the New Testament. Three major reasons for this are: the influence of covenantal theology that erodes the distinctions between the testaments (to the point, in some, if not many, instances, of endorsing supersessionism regarding Israel and the Church—arguably in contradiction of the teachings of Jesus and Paul);⁸ the resurgence of the Biblical Theology movement with its attempts to provide a theological interpretation of the whole of Scripture on one relatively undifferentiated plain;⁹ and, as trivial as it may seem, the fact that for moderns, the Bible in its entirety is written in a single language (English for us and most of our readers).¹⁰ This makes it seem as if the two books are identical, when they are not. Their inspiration may be the same, and their ultimate purpose of leading to Christ univocal, but there are also large and manifest differences. The Hebrew Bible was written to point to Christ and to guide God’s chosen people who would bring Christ into the world. Apart from interpreting any of its teachings through the lens of Christ, the Old Testament was and in some ways remains the scriptures of Israel and not of the Church *in the same way* as the New Testament is. If the Old Testament foretold Christ, the New Testament contains the fulfillment in Christ. The New Testament was written by Christ-followers for Christ-followers, who are tasked with proclamation of the good news to the world.

8 See, for example, Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary*, NTM 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 204-22.

9 The Biblical Theology movement had pretty much died out, until there was a re-emergence of the movement in the form of what is sometimes called the Theological Interpretation of Scripture. The Bible is read for its theological meaning (from everywhere and anywhere), often on the basis of pre-modern interpretation, regardless of one’s historical-critical or other informed means of reading. For a background and history of Biblical Theology, see B. S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology”; and C.H.H. Scobie, “History of Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 3-11, 11-20. For a critique of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement, see Stanley E. Porter, “What Exactly Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Is It Hermeneutically Robust Enough for the Task to Which It Has Been Appointed?” in *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony C. Thiselton*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 2234-67.

10 This does not mean that those who know that the two testaments were written in different languages are not also part of this problem.

The implications of such a viewpoint for political theology are that the major passage that is often invoked as a justification for political action of Christians—Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”—is only applicable so far as these teachings can be seen to be part of the Christian proclamation. The interpretive emphasis of this passage is often upon the notion of acting justly, with the result that there has been a revival of a new form of social justice, with concern for the poor, etc. This concern has been taken up in various movements, including but not restricted to Liberation Theology (one of the forms of political theology mentioned above). The message of the New Testament, however, has both a different definition of justice than the Old Testament and a shift in emphasis upon mercy that encompasses justice. Specifically, the Christian notions of justification, reconciliation, and salvation involve a skewed balance in which humans do not simply receive justice (although divine justice is ultimately served through them) but, on the basis of the death of Christ, receive mercy for which they are unqualified and that is unmerited.

Having decided that a Christian political theology needs a basis in the New Testament—or at least that we need to know how the New Testament addresses matters of political theology—we now must determine where to look in the New Testament. Three general areas of the New Testament have been suggested as having particularly high political interests. These might provide ways of estimating a New Testament basis for political theology.

a. The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ longest uninterrupted discourse in the four Gospels. Because of its teaching, some have suggested that the grounds for various types of social action (or in-action) can be found in the sermon. After all, Jesus tells his listeners that they are to be salt and light in the world, so as to “shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16; NIV2011). Jesus appears to redefine the Old Testament law in his series of “You have heard...but” statements, including the one that says, “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to

them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile [as the Romans had the right to do], go with them two miles” (Matt 5:39-41; NIV2011). This sounds like a promising basis for a political theology, and it in fact has been, especially for those within the pacifist tradition, whether that be complete passivity or passive resistance.¹¹

The problem with such an approach, however, is that it is not clear to all interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount whether this is the most appropriate stance to take in relation to its interpretation. In fact, whether one studies the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount from a historical perspective or one studies it simply in terms of contemporary viable options, there is a wide range of opinion, even among those who claim to be taking the teachings of Jesus as found in the Sermon seriously.¹² For example, we have identified at least ten major options to interpreting the Sermon on the Mount (and there may well be others, or at least variations upon them). These include: the existential approach, in which the Sermon is a call to “authentic” existence; classical liberalism, in which the Sermon provides guidance for how humanity should treat each other to make progress in society; social redemption approach, in which (similar to that immediately before) redemption is secured by society as it implements the Sermon; penitential approach, in which the unreachable legal standard compels the failing sinner to rely upon God’s grace; Matthean community ethics, in which the Matthean community formulates an ethic guarding against antinomianism (possibly Paul?); ecclesiastical approach, in which the Sermon provides an ethic for the church that must exist in the world; interim ethic, in which Jesus proposed this

11 For example, such an approach seems to underlie such a volume as Willard M. Swartley, ed., *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), even if not all of the essayists take the same perspective. See in particular Dorothy Jean Weaver, “Transforming Nonresistance: From Lex Talionis to ‘Do Not Resist the Evil One,’” 32-71, Richard A. Horsley, “Ethics and Exegesis: ‘Love Your Enemies’ and the Doctrine of Nonviolence,” 72-101, and Walter Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus’ Third Way (Matt. 5:38-42 par.,” 102-25.

12 For a brief survey of the history of interpretation from the Reformation to the present, see Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 14-22.

ethic until his (soon-expected) return; pacifist approach, in which Christians are called to non-participation in the power-structures of the world (see above); millennial or kingdom approach, in which the Sermon provides the ethic for the millennial kingdom; and dispensationalist approach, in which the Sermon provides an ethic for the church age.¹³ If one of these positions were to emerge as the way to interpret Jesus' major discourse, then it would hold out hope of becoming the basis for a political theology (although not all of the proposals above have an overt political element to their position). Admittedly, not all of these can be correct, and some of them are no doubt more convincing or substantial than others. However, that is not the point. The point is that there is such diversity of opinion among legitimate interpreters through the ages, continuing to the present, that such a passage can hardly be said to provide the basis for a political theology, or at least a political theology that will command common consent.

b. Empire Studies

Empire studies are one of the burgeoning areas of New Testament studies. The contention of Empire Studies is that many, if not most, of the books of the New Testament were written in direct opposition to the ruling Roman Empire. Whereas the Romans proclaimed the Caesar as divine and thanked the gods for bestowing blessing through him, Christians proclaimed a different anointed one, Jesus the Christ. There have been a number of strong voices in advocacy of the Empire hypothesis. Richard Horsley was one of the first to promote such a position by gathering together a number of scholars who explored the notion of anti-imperial rhetoric in the New Testament.¹⁴ Some of the strongest proponents of such a position are

13 These are discussed in a variety of sources, even popular ones, such as D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 151-57; and Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1981), 86-94.

14 Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997). An even earlier advocate is Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

Warren Carter in Gospel studies,¹⁵ and N. T. Wright in Pauline studies. Wright summarizes the course of such study, with which he is in broad agreement and which he attempts to develop further. He states that “the cult of Caesar, so far from being one new religion among many in the Roman world had already by the time of Paul’s missionary activity become not only the dominant cult in a large part of the empire, certainly in the parts where Paul was active, but was actually the means...whereby the Romans managed to control and govern such huge areas as came under their sway.”¹⁶ As a result, Wright notes that in emperor worship, the people were involved in both political and religious acts. In response, Paul in his theology constitutes “a major challenge to precisely that imperial cult and ideology which was part of the air Paul and his converts breathed.”¹⁷ Paul saw himself as “an ambassador for a king-in-waiting, establishing cells of people loyal to this new king, and ordering their lives according to his story, his symbols and his praxis, and their minds according to his truth. This could not but be construed as deeply counterimperial, as subversive to the whole edifice of the Roman Empire.”¹⁸

There have been a number of responses to such a position on the New Testament and anti-imperialism. Three of them are worth noting. There are, first, those who have continued to develop the notion of the anti-imperial rhetoric in the New Testament. Wright is one of these, but so are a number of others who have picked up various elements of language within the New Testament—such as the use of the term “gospel,” affirmation of Jesus as Lord and Savior (as opposed to Caesar), and exegesis of various passages that are said to affirm such a stance (e.g. Philippians 3 and its discussion of citizenship)—and seen the New Testament as a thoroughly subversive text

15 Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

16 N.T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 160-83, here 161.

17 Wright, “Paul’s Gospel,” 161.

18 Wright, “Paul’s Gospel,” 161-62.

within its political milieu.¹⁹ This might well constitute the basis of an antagonistic political theology. A second position is to recognize that there are resonances of language that have anti-imperial overtones within Paul's writings, but without seeing the entire New Testament, or even Paul himself, as overwhelmingly motivated by anti-imperial rhetoric. Such a position recognizes that Paul lived, moved, and breathed within the Roman imperial world, that he had numerous encounters with the structures of power, and that he both benefited from and was hindered by such encounters. Nevertheless, even if he drew upon some of his own rhetoric in framing his own response to Rome, this does not mean that anti-imperialism formed the basis of his rhetorical stance.²⁰ The third position is to reject the anti-imperial position as offering either an accurate interpretation of Paul's motivating force and purpose in his writings or an accurate assessment of the literary situation of early Christianity within the Roman world. Such a position has been taken by John Barclay, first in a direct response to Wright, and then in subsequent publication of his paper. Barclay admits that the Roman Empire was an important force, and that some of Paul's language may have had some resonance in the imperial context, but argues that Wright's view of Paul's purportedly subtle and cryptic anti-imperial rhetoric represents a fundamental misunderstanding.²¹ However, even Barclay sees Paul as having a political theology, although that theology considers the Roman Empire as a minor player on the cosmic stage.²² In other words, there may be

19 Wright ("Paul's Gospel," 164-81) develops these kinds of ideas himself, but he is not alone. See some of the essays in Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

20 For example, see the essays in Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds., *Empire in the New Testament, McMaster New Testament Studies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), with numerous essays that offer anti-imperial readings (e.g. Warren Carter, Craig A. Evans, Tom Thatcher, Matthew Forrest Lowe) and in particular Porter, "Paul Confronts Caesar with the Good News," 164-96, where a narratological comparison of Romans and the so-called Priene inscription is offered.

21 John M.G. Barclay, first in his paper "Why the Roman Empire was Insignificant to Paul," and then greatly expanded and annotated in Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews: Studies in the Social Formation of Christian Identity*, WUNT 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 363-87.

22 Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 383-84.

a political theology within Paul—or the New Testament as a whole—but it does not seem to be commonly agreed that it is based upon subversion of the established earthly powers. Nevertheless, as some scholars have argued on the basis of historical evidence, such as the First and Second Jewish Revolts, any form of resistance against Roman governance or Hellenism by the Jews or in Judea shortly before and during New Testament times seemed to have arisen from matters concerning Jewish religion, and in particular, the emperor cult or worship.²³

c. Household Codes as Indicating Roman Social Norms

In several passages within the New Testament including Paul's letters—the so-called deutero-Pauline letters of Ephesians, Colossians, and Titus—there are passages that are often said to be distinguished by their own formal features.²⁴ These are the so-called *Haustafeln* or household codes. The three agreed upon household codes in the New Testament are Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, and 1 Peter 2:17-3:9, with some also suggesting 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 6:1-10 (in other words, all of them appear in passages for which there is disputed authorship within the New Testament). The major examples of these household codes include groupings of people and

23 On this, see Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (Linguistic Biblical Studies 12; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 145-47.

24 Several of the best-known works on these are: David L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune, SBLSPS 21 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 25-50; Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in I Peter*, SBLMS26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), 1-10; George E. Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 95-131; James E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel*, FRLANT 109 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), esp. 9-36; John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of I Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), 208-20; James P. Hering, *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context: An Analysis of Their Origins, Relationship, and Message*, AUS 7.260 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 9-60; Abraham J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2.26.1, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 267-333, esp. 304-13; J. Paul Sampley, 'And the Two Shall Become One Flesh': A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33, SNTSMS 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 17-30; and Angela Standhartinger, "The Origin and Intention of the Household Code in the Letter to the Colossians," JSNT 79 (2000): 117-30.

instructions on how they are to treat one another. For example, in Ephesians 5:21-6:9, there are three sets of individuals identified, and within each group there are two individuals who are seen to be in relationship with each other. These three groups are wives and husbands, children and fathers, and slaves and masters, with it noted that the socially inferior is listed before the superior (this arrangement seems to go back as far as Aristotle, *Politics* 1253). There is some variation upon this pattern present in virtually all of the household codes, especially the ones in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter. Within the New Testament, at least in the major passages mentioned above, there are two further features: a degree of reciprocity between the matched pairs; and a basis in the work of Christ for the ethical statements that are made regarding behavior.

These passages have appeared to stand out sufficiently within the New Testament writings to merit attention. This attention has centered upon both formal characteristics and origins. As a result, there are a number of different theories regarding their origins and configuration.²⁵ The first phase argued that these household codes originated in fixed forms from the Stoic moral philosophers. The next phase saw these as originating in earlier Jewish thought. The third phase saw the influence of more contemporary Hellenistic Judaism upon their creation. For both the second and third phases, the strong formal features of the household codes were emphasized. The fourth phase saw them as serving a social function within Roman society as a means of assuring the Romans that the early Christian communities posed no threat to Roman social order. The fifth and final phase sees these household codes as serving a social function within the formation of the Christian community, without a larger apologetic force. The fifth stage is the one that is generally thought to best explain the evidence that we have within the household codes, in which they have been integrated into the larger argument of the respective letters in which they are found.

As a result of such discussion, there are a number of problems with using the household codes as a basis for political theology. One of these is that they only appear in books that have disputed author-

25 See Stanley E. Porter, "Paul, Virtues, Vices and Household Codes" in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

ship, whether this is Paul or Peter. The basis for a robust political theology would appear to demand a basis in the main writings of the New Testament, such as the Gospels (see the first proposal above regarding the Sermon on the Mount) or Paul's writings (see the second proposal above that concentrated upon Paul's letters). In the case of the household codes, there are only three clear and agreed upon passages, even if there are a few others that have some common features, and all of them are in disputed letters. Another problem is that only one of the five proposals actually has a strong political dimension to it. The fourth stage sees the household codes as serving a socio-political function in that the codes were means of regulating early Christian social life so as to minimize conflict with the Romans and to assure them that they had nothing to fear from these emerging Christian groups. This view has, however, passed out of fashion, as more and more scholars have come to recognize that, whatever their origins in the religious thought or popular morality of the time, the household codes played not an external but an internal formative role in the Christian community. Thus, what we can at most say is that these household codes, when compared to the societal and cultural norms then, appear to be counter-cultural so as to form the basis of how the early Christian communities ought to conduct themselves in the house of God, and perhaps in their own households.

d. Canon within a Canon

If the previous ideas have not provided the basis for a political theology, then perhaps such a theology can be found within a select group of texts within the New Testament. Two texts come immediately to mind: Rom 13:1-7 and 2 Pet 2:13-17. Romans 13:1-7 says this:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear

of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (NIV2011).

This passage seems very straightforward, and interpreting it in this way has led to endless grief throughout Christian history. Confusion over what it meant to be subject to governing authorities led to the two kingdoms Lutheran theology that paralyzed an entire people in the light of Nazi Germany.²⁶ However, we do not believe that that is the only or even best interpretation of this passage. This passage, because of its apparent difficult political ethic, has been subject to much interpretation. Some have posited that this is a later interpolation and not authentically Pauline. Others have defined the "governing authorities" as spiritual powers. Many if not most have begrudgingly accepted its apparent endorsement of blanket acceptance of the unqualified authority of the state (governing authorities), while also trying to determine where the legitimate boundaries of power lie.²⁷ Porter has argued, however, that there has been a misunderstanding of this verse, and that instead the "governing authorities" are (based upon the use of the modifying word elsewhere in the New Testament) "upright authorities," that is, those who morally do right. If this interpretation is correct, then this changes the interpretation of the entire passage. In fact, it makes better sense of much of the passage, because

26 For example, we believe that this Lutheran theology contributed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's anxiety over his view of appropriate action to take regarding Adolf Hitler.

27 These opinions are surveyed in Stanley E. Porter, "Romans 13:1-7 as Pauline Political Rhetoric," *Filología Neotestamentaria* 3 (1990) 11-39.

it is only with a just authority that one can expect good behavior to be rewarded and bad behavior to be punished.²⁸ 1 Peter 2:13-17 says this:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (NIV2011).

This passage is, in many ways, similar to the passage in Romans 13. The traditional interpretation of this passage is that it calls for unqualified obedience to human authorities, beginning with the emperor and then extending to his subordinates, such as governors.²⁹ The passage seems to assume that those who do what is right will be rewarded by not being seen as fools. As in the Romans passage, however, this passage is not as evidently clear as some would have it be.³⁰ The problematic phrases include “for the Lord's sake” and “every human authority.” The use of language of “authority” found in many translations makes a stronger political statement than is actually found within the passage. The phrase can mean instead “every human created structure,” without necessarily implying human and political authority and without necessarily demanding complete obedience. The phrase “for the Lord's sake” may be better rendered “because of the Lord,” which introduces a higher level of appeal for any act of

28 See Porter, *Letter to the Romans*, 243-50.

29 For traditional interpretations, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 179-88, with an excursus that attempts to distinguish the Petrine from the Roman passage, but that takes Romans as dealing with divinely established authorities; and Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 157-65.

30 See Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 174-78.

obedience or submission. This understanding makes better interpretive sense of the passage, as it is only when there is discretion for behavior—obedience and submission only when warranted—that one is actually doing good and can present an example to others, especially that of being a free person who is in control of one’s own decisions and behavior. The punishment of wrongdoing can only be counted upon by authorities that are just. Showing proper respect and honor may well mean disagreeing or not being obedient when inappropriate action is being demanded. Moreover, the evidence we find in the New Testament and other extracanonical literature by the early church Fathers seems to point clearly to the fact that the early Christians were martyred because they only chose to submit to “upright authorities.”

With these two verses we appear to be able to come closer to a basis in the New Testament for a political theology, albeit not without several problems. The first is that their traditional interpretations do not provide a strong basis for a reflective political theology. The traditional interpretations of these passages simply perpetuate the status quo and do not promote the kind of strong Christian basis for a robust political theology. A second problem is that the alternative and, we believe, preferred understandings of these passages have, so far, not commanded widespread assent among the exegetical community, even if these interpretations are the way in which Christians choose to live out their moral and ethical lives, that is, determining their obedience on the basis of the moral status of the request. A third problem, and perhaps the most difficult one to overcome, is that this proposal demands a “canon within a canon.” By attending to a small group of texts, the rest of the New Testament is not taken into consideration, and the entire council of Scripture is not considered in formulating a political theology. As Carter categorically states, “It is not sufficient to declare Romans 13:1-7 the norm or to engage just a small ‘canon’ of texts...”³¹

31 Warren Carter, “The Question of the State and the State of the Question: The Roman Empire and New Testament Theologies,” in *Interpretation and the Claims of the Text: Resourcing New Testament Theology*, ed. Jason A. Whitlark, et al. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 197-211, here 209. One could make a similar claim for, for example, using a text such as Philemon and its implicit overthrow of slave conventions (similar to the kind of inversion of values found in the household codes).

Our brief survey of previous proposals leads us to re-examine the basis for creating a New Testament political theology.

Creating a New Testament Political Theology

After a brief survey of a number of different proposals regarding the formulation of a New Testament political theology, we must admit that a strong basis for developing such a foundation has not been found. This conclusion must not be interpreted to mean that we believe that the pursuit of developing a political theology is not a legitimate endeavor. Nor should it be interpreted to mean that we believe that it is impossible to formulate such a political theology in relation to the New Testament. We are simply saying that, of the possible approaches that might be used in creating such a political philosophy, none of the ones that we have examined have provided such a foundation. They are either too narrow in their formulations, too limited in their appeal, insufficient in their textual basis, or too speculative in their interpretations to provide the kind of foundation that a robust and substantial political theology deserves. This does not mean, however, that there are not those who have formulated such political theologies, claiming that they are grounded in the New Testament. Some of them may have, but we have not discovered them here. Others of them, we suspect, are left without sufficient warrant for the political theology that they are describing on the basis of using too highly selective or unrepresentative an approach to the question of what constitutes the New Testament textual basis for such a political theology.

We can see several ways forward in this discussion. One is if some of the proposals discussed above gain wider assent among the scholarly community. If this were to be the case, then the texts that we have discussed might well constitute a firm basis for understanding a New Testament approach to political theology that could be drawn upon in formulating a political theology for the present. Another is to rethink the nature of what is being asked by speaking of the New Testament basis for political theology. If there are insufficient texts or insufficient categories of texts to provide the basis for such a political theology, then perhaps the terms of discussion—the rules of engagement so to speak—need to be changed so that it is more readily

apparent how the New Testament relates to political theology. However, on the basis of our initial discussion of the foundations of the discipline, it was noted that the notion of political theology was born in an environment of generalizations regarding not just the Bible or the New Testament (which did not figure at all in the discussion) but theology itself. We would have some concerns for a discipline that claimed to be making statements about Christian theology that was not able to find at least some biblical and preferably New Testament warrant for its agenda.

Conclusion

This essay has been more negative than positive in its results. This is because we have begun at first principles. That is, we have not assumed that there is a sufficient New Testament basis for political theology—regardless of how political theology is being defined (at least within the three broad categories that seem pertinent). In light of this, we have undertaken to see how one might go about discovering or creating such a New Testament basis, by examining four different proposals that are closely attached to the text but also have some more readily apparent political and theological implications. We have explored all four of them at least sufficiently to see that, so far as we can determine, none of them offers the kind of firm, broad foundation necessary for a robust political theology that is able to address major issues in political, social, and economic structure from a scriptural standpoint. The Sermon on the Mount, as promising as this text appears and as useful as it has been for at least limited political advocacy groups, proves insufficient due to the failure to find an adequately widespread interpretation of the passage. In fact, the interpretation that is most commonly used for such political advocacy is probably one of the least plausible interpretations of the passage. This sends up a warning rather than settles the issue. Empire studies are similar to the Sermon on the Mount. Even though there has been much enthusiasm for this emerging area of New Testament studies, there is simply too little general assent to make it the basis of a functioning political theology. Those who are most enthusiastic about the anti-imperial rhetoric of the New Testament are, in fact, probably the least convincing in their advocacy of the position. The

household codes, while apparently indicating a type of moral philosophy in use in the ancient world, are too narrowly confined in their scope and not central enough within the New Testament corpus to provide a firm foundation, especially when we realize that they were probably formulated not in terms of Roman politics but of focus upon formation in local Christian communities. Finally, we examined two similar texts that have been used as the basis for political theologies of the past, ones that have endorsed unqualified obedience to the state. We believe that such interpretations of these passages are no longer tenable, and that their traditional interpretations probably owe more to the history of interpretation than to close engagement with the text. Even if we could agree that these passages provide a robust basis for a political theology (and we believe that they perhaps face in that direction) appealing to a small group of select texts still does not provide the basis for a political theology of widespread application.

We must conclude that the goal of seeking the New Testament foundation for a robust political theology is not just a desired goal but a mandatory goal. We so far have not discovered that New Testament foundation.

The Problem of Liberal Tolerance: Zizek's Political Theology

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By reason could I have arrived at knowing that I must love my neighbour and not oppress him? I was told that in my childhood, and I believed it gladly, for they told me what was already in my soul. But who discovered it? Not reason. Reason discovered the struggle for existence, and the law that requires us to oppress all who hinder the satisfaction of our desires. ... But loving one's neighbour reason could never discover, because it is irrational.

– Levin, in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

The conflict between “foreign” cultural practices and national values became an (unnecessary?) issue during the 2015 Canadian federal election this past Fall when the niqab (the fabric face covering worn by some Muslim women) became a central platform of political debate. Setting aside the subtle racism, sexism and religious bigotry that was inherent in these conversations, in that politicians were targeting a very small group of mostly non-white Muslim women (who are largely well-educated homemakers that assert they adopted the practice freely after moving to Canada),¹ questions regarding the

1 The 2014 study, by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, of niqab-wearing women noted that the average niqab-wearing woman is in her late 20 or early 30s, married, religiously conservative, and born outside Canada but adopted the practice after moving to Canada. She has a post-secondary education, states that her primary occupation is homemaker but also works outside the home in some professional contract or social service work. Her rationale for wearing a niqab is either one of religious devotion or religious identity. Not one woman in the study states that a family-member encouraged or coerced her to wear it. See Lynda Clarke, “Women in Niqab Speak: a Study of the Niqab in Canada,” *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*, 2015. Online: <http://ccmw.com/women-in-niqab-speak-a-study-of-the-niqab-in-canada/>.

place of the niqab during civil ceremonies like the oath of citizenship brought to the forefront the limits of liberal tolerance in Canadian society.

The question of tolerance is important for Christians. This is because the biblical commands to care for the stranger, the foreigner, the poor and the marginalized, make it vital for Christian thinkers to ask themselves whether the liberal model of tolerance is the best one for fulfilling their religious ideals. It is in this question that I believe value comes in engaging with the thought of the prominent Hegelian-Marxist philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst, and social critic, Slavoj Žižek.

Still largely unknown in North America, Žižek is arguably one of the most significant living philosophers today. Having been found in places as diverse as university lecture halls, prominent international news media outlets like Guardian and Aljazeera, and even on a stool during Occupy Wall Street, the “Elvis of cultural theory” has gained increasing fame for his charged attacks on liberalism, capitalism and even past expressions of communism. Why should the Christian thinker listen to Žižek? Three reasons: first, he has engaged some of the leading Christian thinkers in the world (e.g., John Milbank); second, he often appeals to Christianity and Christian theology in his own writings and lectures;² and third, because of the first two I believe that he can offer something to contemporary Christians on the subject of liberal tolerance. As such, this paper will outline the classical idea of liberal tolerance, present Žižek’s critique of it along with his theological-philosophical response of “loving thy neighbour,” and conclude with an assessment on the value Žižek has for contemporary Christians.

2 The most poignant examples being: *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why the Christian Legacy is Worth Fighting For* (2000), *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (2006), and *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (2010).

The Problem of Liberal Tolerance

If I observe the Friday [prayers] with the Mahometans [sic], or the Saturday [Shabbat] with the Jews, or the Sunday with the Christian; whether I pray with or without form; whether I worship God in the various and pompous ceremonies of the papists [Catholics], or in the plain way of the Calvinists; I see nothing in any of these, if they be done sincerely and out of conscience, that can of itself make me either the worse subject to my prince or worse neighbor to my fellow-subject...

– John Locke³

The virtue of tolerance is primary for modern liberalism. Rooted in the struggle for religious freedom, this classical liberal value was best articulated by the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke. Writing in the aftermath of the (poorly named) European “Wars of Religion” and the English Civil War,⁴ Locke’s ideas would resonate with the majority of the modern developed world. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), Locke argues that since the purpose of the political state was to support the life, liberty and property rights of all its citizens, the power of the state must be limited to that which concerns the physical welfare of society only. The church is a voluntary society aimed at piety and virtue, which are by-products of the individual soul and mind, two things that are not susceptible to coercion. Since virtue and piety are under God’s authority alone, and cannot be given to any man or magistrate, even in a social contract,

3 John Stuart Mill, “A Letter concerning Toleration,” *Liberty Fund*, 2010. Online: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2375>

4 The European wars of religions, commonly traced back to the Protestant Reformation and subsequent struggles between Catholics and various Protestant sects, could be better interpreted as the European wars of the nascent nation-state; the majority of these conflicts were fundamentally political, as national groups were fighting for independence against late medieval social and political systems that included coerced loyalty to empires, kingdoms and the transnational Roman Catholic Church. One scholar who has explained this alternative reading of history has been William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the state cannot physically coerce religion through established policy, laws or force. This means that, to the state, one's religious commitments are irrelevant to being a good citizen and it is the job of the state to protect religious diversity.

Why has the liberal virtue of tolerance become so successful in so many societies? Why has the virtue – first aimed at religious liberty, the cornerstone of modern human rights – become so potent that it has been expanded to include the approved disposition for a plurality of human differences? In his essay “The Politics of Recognition,” the world-renown social philosopher and Canadian Roman Catholic Charles Taylor argues that the intellectual history of liberal cultural tolerance is rooted in the idea of identity recognition; the idea that society ought to recognize each person's particular cultural, racial, national, sexual, and gender identity.⁵ Taylor contends that the root of these demands is found within the transformation of medieval sociopolitical values like dignity and honour into modern thought. Notions of honour and dignity were traditionally identified with class; that is, those in the noble class were publicly recognized as bearers of dignity because of some honour given to them (e.g., the royal grant of lands and title, knighthood, or other public honour). During the post-Enlightenment period, social theorists began to universalize and internalize these concepts (e.g., “the dignity of human beings”), perceiving that everyone shares equally in a common human dignity.⁶

With the internalization and universalization of dignity and honour, Taylor argues that, during the 18th Century, these ideas became fused with the idea that humans were born with an intuitive moral sense, the inward ability to know right from wrong (e.g., Luther's “conscience,” Kant's “the moral law within,” Rousseau's “natural man”). Since humans were born with an internal moral guide, it was necessary for each human to follow that moral guidance. To fail to do so would force a person to become alienated from themselves and express an inauthentic humanity. In this context, theologians and philosophers (e.g., Rousseau and Herder) called upon their readers

5 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition” in Amy Gutman, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-75.

6 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 27.

to act authentically (Rousseau's "le sentiment de l'existence"), to take ownership of living their own lives, be 'true to themselves' and reject any form of conformity (since social conformity robs humans of their passion).⁷

The connection between authenticity and dignity is evident. Human beings possess an innate dignity or honour, which cannot be given or taken away, and within this, humans possess an individual moral conscience which ought to guide one's behavior and be expressed freely. This forms a human's *identity*. Being a free and public expression of one's inner conscience, a person's identity ought to be honored by other humans in order to reinforce that person's natural dignity. This means, Taylor argues, that one's identity (and the subsequent self-dignity) occurs in a dialectical relationship between the internal person and external social world. Identity formation does not occur in isolation, he postulates; it is a dialogue between the internal and the external, the public and private.⁸ Identity, therefore, can be formed or malformed through the recognition or misrecognition by others; hence the importance of personal relationships for self-affirmation in such societies. And in such identity-focused cultures, then, the failure to positively and equally recognize inward-born identities publically has had a tremendous impact upon the individuals involved. Taylor writes, "The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized...discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression."⁹ Therefore, connection between authenticity and dignity is evident. If there is a natural (publically-affirmed) dignity to being human, and if true humanity is an authentic expression of inner self free from coercive exterior forces, then one's feeling of (publically-affirmed) dignity is connected to the freedom to genuinely express themselves (i.e., identity).

While the word 'tolerance' itself implies a power-dynamic, where

7 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 29.

8 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 34-35.

9 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 36.

the dominant group tolerates (or suffers) the minority,¹⁰ ideally, in liberal societies it speaks of a dialectical partnership between different parties within the same society; all groups, dominant and minority, have to tolerate and recognize the other. An example comes from a recent study on religious inclusion within the Canadian elementary classroom. Among several interviews with elementary teachers, one interview stood out as highlighting the value of promoting tolerance in multicultural societies. A teacher of a class composed completely of refugee children from war-torn nations explains that her first month is dedicated to multicultural understanding:

I have a large number of Muslims in my classroom, and I have a smaller group of Christians, and what's different about my classroom from a regular classroom is that everyone has a faith in my classroom, whereas in a regular classroom in Canada you'd get a lot of kids that are coming from more of an agnostic or atheistic home, so for us religion is normal. It's a normal part of our lives, so the thing about our classroom which would be unique from a regular classroom is that [religion] probably pops up a whole lot more, and our kids are coming from backgrounds where tolerance wasn't taught in the framework, so I have to teach them tolerance. So something that would come up would be eating pork, for example. So the Christians in our classroom eat pork, they have no problem with it. . . . So, at lunch time, when someone's eating bologna and the Muslims are going, "Is that a pig?" . . . I've had to work with Muslim kids to say, "They can eat that because they're not Muslim and it's not against their religion to eat that" and they'll go "Oh!" and that's a new idea for them . . . and so they start to realize that different religions have different rules, and it makes sense to them that you follow your own religion's rules.¹¹

10 The word "tolerance" has origins in the Latin verb *tolerare*, which refers to enduring pain.

11 Cathlene Hillier, "But we're already doing it: Ontario Teachers' Responses to Policies on Religious Inclusion and Accommodation in Public Schools," *Alberta Journal*

In addition, this teacher also has to address negative feelings between religions because some of her students come from countries that have had a high degree of religious conflict.

Or, their concept is, depending on which country they came from, that the religion that you're not are the bad guys. They're the ones with the guns, and they're the guys that, if the war is about religion, then you can come with some really poor attitudes towards other faiths. So we have to talk about war and why we came here and how tolerance is a good thing and respect is a good thing.¹²

From the perspective of new immigrants, tolerance within a multicultural society is a virtue valued in all its members. While there may be a perception in the popular western psyche of “us” giving “them” the privilege of living in “our” country, entering the liberal society requires all members to tolerate each other in search of what John Rawls called an “overlapping consensus.”¹³ The majority society needs to be tolerated by the minority groups within it in order to function effectively as a liberal society. Liberalism, ideally, does not grant tolerance only on its own terms; i.e., we are intolerant of all intolerance. Rather, the minority groups of the liberal society—that is, all groups within society, as anyone may end up in the minority in a particular instance—must be tolerant of a majority comprised of a multitude of minorities, or a consensus can never be obtained.

So real freedom in liberalism requires toleration of the individual and their ethnic identity. In his famous work *Jerusalem*, the 18th Century German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn appeals to his society's liberal values in his call for ethno-religious tolerance. After a long theological-political exposition seeking to show how Jews could be both faithful European citizens and Jews, Mendelssohn argues that a true society—one in which everyone sees fellow citizens as comrades working together for mutual happiness—cannot be uni-

of *Educational Research*, 60, no. 4 (2014): 8.

12 Hillier, “But we're already doing it,” 8.

13 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 340.

form in belief or thought; that “is diametrically opposed to true tolerance!” True tolerance, rather, comes within freedom of conscience:

Pay heed to the right conduct of men, upon this bring to bear the tribunal of wise laws, and leave us thought and speech which the Father of us all assigned to us as an inalienable heritage and granted to us as an immutable right. . . . Let everyone be permitted to speak as he thinks, to invoke God after his own manner or that of his fathers, and to seek eternal salvation where he thinks he may find it.¹⁴

For most classical liberal thinkers, like Locke, Mendelssohn, Mill, Spinoza and Wollstonecraft (to name a few), the toleration of different opinions, beliefs, identities, and moralities is essential for any society aimed at happiness and civil stability. This is why liberal societies, therefore, must promote, legislate and educate (or even indoctrinate) the virtue of tolerance within its members. However, in light of growing ethnocultural and religious conflict within liberal societies around the world, the question arises of whether the liberal virtue of tolerance has reached its limits, or is inherently misguided or irrational.

Zizek’s Critique: Fear thy Neighbour?

It appears that the vast majority of people of faith – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. – in North America and Europe have come to identify personally with liberalism; so much so that for many it would be difficult for them to distinguish between their “religious” beliefs and their “sociopolitical” beliefs; if such division can in fact exist. While Zizek is an atheist Marxist Communist and Lacanian psychoanalyst, his engagement with Christian theology from this worldview may allow new insight into the problem of tolerance as a solution to cultural diversity; one that may resonate more with Christian theology than liberalism.

14 Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Or On Religious Power and Judaism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 137-39.

Regarding the problem of multiculturalism, Žizek appeals to the biblical commandment to “love thy neighbour” as the real solution to intercultural conflict; though, as we will see, he makes an innovative interpretation of the mandate. Like the French Communist philosopher Alain Badiou, Žizek contends that the “neighbour” is not a “fellow-man,” a person with whom I have a close relationship. Rather, it is the opposite. The neighbour is the person who is still truly unknown, an abyss beyond my fellow-man. It is this unknowable abyss of the “other”— the unknown neighbour—that citizens of liberal societies have come to see as “toxic” (though it ought to be specifically the part of society that is commanded to be “loved,” according to the Bible).¹⁵

The ideas of toxicity and of “toxic people” have become socially and politically potent within western liberal societies. For whether it is the immigrant, the terrorist, the fundamentalist, the criminal, the pauper or the fat-cat banker, conservative and liberal westerners have come to believe that certain people can be characterized as ‘toxic.’ Žizek asserts that their toxicity is simply rooted in the way that they can potentially disrupt our comfortable existence.¹⁶

In light of this, Žizek identifies two kinds of response. First, from the politically centre-right, a position that is increasingly becoming mainstream, one perceives a desire by politicians and pundits to fight this “toxic other” in an effort to protect national societies and those loved ones within them. To do so nations enact increasingly restrictive and oppressive laws that reveal an inherent racism. And with every new law, new restriction, these societies move closer and closer to making the emergency state normal.¹⁷ They allow the military to

15 Slavoj Žizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic” (presentation at Harvard University, Boston, MA, April 20, 2009). Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8_hROT8VF0&list=PLXi5SoYyURgO_HVJNtzb67cFm41GwtIYK, 12:00. See also, Slavoj Žizek, John Millbank, and Creston Davis, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009). [Kobo Edition, chapter one.]

16 Žizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ,” 21:00.

17 Žizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ,” 24:00. The notion of western nations rapidly evolving into emergency states is a potent one. Powerfully articulated by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his book *State of Exception*, such a state emerges when government suspends or weakens constitutional rights in response to some perceived emergency that justifies this action. It continues as all political power is

patrol our streets, approve deportations and limitations of civil rights, and abuse human-rights. The other response, the one that has been more mainstream in western liberal societies over the past few decades, has been the one given by liberal multiculturalism: tolerance. While Zizek dismisses the first as destructive fundamentalism rooted in a totalitarian ideology, he argues that the second solution is just as problematic. For while the reality of different groups being “violently thrown together” (in the psychoanalytic sense of psychological violence) has presented problems for multicultural societies, presuming that this violence stems from immigration, he argues that their solution does not necessarily come from giving the right answers but also asking the right questions.¹⁸

On the Problems of Liberal Multicultural Tolerance

Zizek’s first challenge to liberal multiculturalism relates to the way in which it presents tolerance as the answer to a wide variety of social problems. He asks repeatedly: “Why are so many problems today perceived as problems of intolerance, [and] not as problems of inequality, exploitation, injustice? Why is the proposed remedy tolerance not emancipation, political struggle, [or] even armed struggle?”¹⁹ The reason is ideology.

Contrary to the 20th Century American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., who rarely spoke of tolerance but freedom and liberation,²⁰ Zizek argues that the idea of tolerance has now become

distilled into one person or one segment of the government, which operates above and outside the law. Such a state of emergency can easily become the new norm, a prolonged reality. See Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Agamben notes how prisoners in Guantanamo Bay military prison have no legal status or civil rights, continuously remaining in a state of limbo outside the law, robbing them of their humanity. Another example would be how Muslim youth, who have come to maturity after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, have grown up with such significant sociopolitical surveillance and suspicion as their common experience that anything else is unknown.

18 Slavoj Zizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself: The Antinomies of Tolerant Reason” (presentation at Boston University, Boston, MA, 2010). Online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5WNCrOCXCM, 8:00.

19 Slavoj Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2008): 660.

20 Zizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 9:00.

a social ideology and the answer to all forms of inequality in western societies. “To perceive these problems as problems of tolerance is to already accept a certain vision of society where, you know, there are naturalized cultures, cultural differences, and we should learn to tolerate each other and so on and so on. Political options disappear here.”²¹ In this vision of contemporary society, most social-political problems become problems of culture, and their answer is simply tolerance rather than any political solutions.²²

Zizek further argues that this focus on tolerance is the by-product of the “culturalization of politics,” where differences of political inequality and economic exploitation are “naturalized and neutralized into mere cultural differences.”²³ (For example, the assertion that Arabs reject democracy because they culturally favour authoritarian rule dismisses the fact that modern authoritarian rule has been a by-product of western colonialism and imperialism, both historic and contemporary. Or the contention that male youth from a particular race or ethnicity are more prone to criminal behaviour because of their culture, misses the socioeconomic inequality that creates systemic poverty and rewards particular behaviours and activities.)

Zizek argues that these cultural differences have become accepted as an inevitable reality in modern liberal societies. They are not going away. Since cultures cannot be assimilated or negated, and since all other forms of political solutions have failed (e.g., welfare state), tolerance has become the ideology of the post-political society; the post-political society is where a society’s problems are no longer understood as political problems but ones of culture and identity. Zizek writes: “Tolerance is their post-political *ersatz*.”²⁴ The “post-political liberal project” has come to identify culture with human nature itself: “culture itself is naturalized, posited as something given” (see

21 Al Jazeera, “Talk to Al Jazeera: Slavoj Zizek,” *YouTube: Al Jazeera Channel*, 11 Oct 2011. Online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qhk8az8K-Y, 10:00.

22 Al Jazeera, “Talk to Al Jazeera: Slavoj Zizek,” 10:00.

23 Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 660; Zizek, “Fear thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 10:00.

24 Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 660, Zizek, “Fear thy Neighbour as Thyself: The Antinomies of Tolerant Reason,” 10:00.

for example Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis).²⁵

In addition, as liberal societies have essentialized culture, they have done so against their own ideological belief that culture is a matter of individual choice, that the individual chooses to participate or not in a cultural tradition. The problem with this, Zizek notes, is that culture is typically something that one has little choice about. Every human being is born into a particular culture, and that culture shapes them and shapes their thinking, so it is difficult to assume that a person could or would choose their culture at any point in their lives. Moreover, the liberal concept of choice itself is constructed within its own internal logic, rooted in a particular philosophical anthropology, so that the concept itself may be meaningless to those outside that worldview.²⁶ The problem with this, Zizek notes, is that western liberal societies use the liberal idea of choice as a dividing point when judging various cultural groups and individuals. Those who can both enjoy their culture, but also perceive themselves as transcendent from it, are good. Those who are wholly dominated by their culture, placing the collective group over the individual, are considered barbarians.²⁷ The problem is that, in advocating an individualistic connection to one's culture, Zizek argues that culture becomes a privatized "way of life" and "an expression of personal and private idiosyncrasies."²⁸ Liberalism overcomes the potential barbarism derived from culture, then, by affirming a universal essence separate from culture (i.e., the detached individual). As such, "Liberalist multiculturalism preaches tolerance between cultures while making it clear that true

25 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 660. In his essay, "The Clash of Civilizations," Samuel Huntington argues that, after the fall of Communism, the future frontlines of international conflict will occur along cultural-civilization lines. Meaning that, the historical evolution of human societies has developed seven major civilization groups (e.g., Western, Islamic, Asian, Afro-Caribbean, etc.), with each civilization having its distinctive cultural characteristics that differ from the others. Since civilization cultures are so comprehensive of the human life, they are bound to conflict with other civilizations. See Samuel Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (2003): 22-49.

26 See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

27 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 661.

28 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 662.

tolerance is fully possible only in individualist western culture and thus legitimating even military interventions as an extreme mode of fighting the other's intolerance."²⁹

There are inevitably "limits to tolerance" in liberal multiculturalism. Can liberal tolerance be tolerant of intolerance? If so, then liberal tolerance is supporting intolerance.³⁰ In this way, liberal tolerance is always caught in a deadlock, Zizek argues, and therefore freedom becomes an illusion, and freedom of choice becomes a pseudo-choice. This does not mean that freedom itself is illusory, but rather the "illusion of freedom" refers to an idea that that western liberals understand that their "freedom" really masks some form of exploitation, but they continue to believe it to be a freedom.³¹ This is why liberal tolerance is an ideology. Notions like freedom are master-signifiers (i.e., grand concepts), which particular ideological systems infuse with particular meanings but confuse its basic meaning as 'free-choice'.

For example, the liberal attitude towards the *hijab* (Muslim veil) accepts the practice of veiling *if* it is a matter of free choice (i.e., not imposed by one's family or community). If a woman chooses to wear it, however, it becomes an act of her idiosyncratic individuality rather than an act of communal identification. The liberal support of the practice, therefore, occurs on its own terms and so robs the act of its original ethno-religious meaning. As Zizek writes: "What this means is that the subject of free choice (in a western tolerant, multicultural sense) can only emerge as the result of an extremely violent process of being torn out of one's particular life world, of being cut off from one's roots."³² Ironically, in order to promote this freedom, liberal toler-

29 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 662.

30 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 663.

31 Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) 17, 22, 113, 185-190. Another example of this ideological illusion of freedom that Zizek offers is the fight over the word 'freedom': the neoconservative efforts to "demonstrate how egalitarian democracy, embodied in the welfare state, necessarily leads to a new form of serfdom . . . while social democrats stress how individual freedom, to have any meaning at all, must be based upon democratic social life, equality of economic opportunity, and so forth." (96)

32 Zizek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," 663; see also Slavoj Zizek, "Against Human Rights," *New Left Review*, 34 (2005). Online: <http://newleftreview.org/II/34/>

ance places religion in a subordinated position within liberal society. When ethno-religious identification is private, it is tolerated as free choice, but when it is made public it is perceived as fundamentalism.

So, despite their subjection of culture into private idiosyncrasies, liberals forget that the value of multicultural tolerance is rooted in their own cultural history. The doctrine of tolerance developed after the catastrophe of the Thirty Years War between Catholic and Protestants,³³ when people from fundamentally different backgrounds came to coexist. This coexistence, Zizek argues, demanded more than “a condescending tolerance of diverging religions” and more than compromise; it demanded respect for another’s religion. And while some thinkers argue that liberalism today has only distorted this origin, Zizek contends that liberalism itself is “thoroughly anti-essentialist” as it perceives itself to be unlike the “barbarian other,” who is actually a fundamentalist essentialist who makes “historically conditioned contingent traits” like religion, culture, or ethnicity essential. In fact, according to Zizek, then, western liberalism actually may be even worse than nonliberal cultures, for it masks oppression as free choice.³⁴ Since, in liberalism, I am defined in abstract and universal terms like ‘humanity’ (*tabula rasa* = blank slate) and ‘identity,’ liberal capitalism has been able to commoditize human life and make ‘culture’ a mere contingency to human nature.³⁵

In addition to tolerance being a problematic ideology to resolve problems of multiculturalism, Zizek also critiques the methodology with which liberal societies enact and promote tolerance. Contrary to “loving thy neighbor,” the heart of the methodology of liberal multicultural tolerance is the idea of “knowing their story” as a way to genuinely understand the other.³⁶ The roadblock to true love for liberalism, according to Zizek, is the objectification of the other, and it is this objectification which knowing (‘genuine understanding’) overcomes. This doctrine is based upon the premise that, if we

slavoj-zizek-against-human-rights.

33 Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 665.

34 Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 666-67.

35 Zizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 673.

36 Zizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ,” 31:00.

genuinely understand another person, we will no longer consider that person our enemy; he or she will no longer be “toxic.” While certainly polemical (perhaps even committing a straw man fallacy), Žizek contends that the best methodology western liberal societies have developed for creating such loving understanding has been “hearing the other person’s story”; for an enemy is only someone whose story you have not yet heard.³⁷ Examples include the bio-pic film or the human-interest story in news media, or the government-project in Iceland where ethno-religious minorities visited Euro-Icelander families in their homes to tell their own personal stories.³⁸ The success here comes when the genuine humanity of the other confronts the westerner’s prejudicial perceptions of them and their personal stories disarm their toxicity.

Why is this situation so problematic? Well, Žizek asks, if knowing another’s story really makes that person less evil or monstrous, could we say the same thing about Hitler? Can hearing stories of Hitler being compassionate to children and animals make him less monstrous? Rather, as Hannah Arendt has argued, the people who have caused great evil are not some sublime demonic figures; they are rather ordinary. Ordinary people are capable of the greatest horrors. This is the problem with liberal tolerance. It assumes that knowing the stories of others will detoxify them. Rather, what makes the other terrifying and toxic is not their inhumanity but their humanity. Humanity can be monstrous. So while our neighbor may have a good story, Žizek argues, that story does not make the neighbour less terrible or toxic. The dimension of toxicity exists somewhere else.³⁹

Moreover, Žizek contends that the stories we tell others, and even those that we tell ourselves, are never truly authentic. Our stories are always lies. They are always told with an agenda, seeking to shape another perception of us.⁴⁰ Even the last words of dying people are never genuine expressions of emotion, but rather attempts to shape the way in which we are remembered. As such, knowing the

37 Žizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 14:00.

38 Žizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 15:00.

39 Žizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ,” 37:00.

40 Žizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 18:00.

stories of another does little to increase our understanding of them, for there is always a gap between people's intimate experiences and their outward actions. "Inner authenticity is no guarantee against ethical monstrosity," Zizek states.⁴¹ Toxicity must exist beyond biography.

There is an abyss between reality and our ideological representation of reality; even if that reality involves our own humanity. The function of ideologies like liberal multiculturalism is to avoid, exclude, or disavow reality and thus to fail to confront it. This is the problem, Zizek contends, with every universalistic ethical system (except psychoanalytical ethics).⁴² They contain idealisms and dogmas which we then use uncritically to fit into our experiences. Zizek noted that Kant observed this truth when he argued that the true significance of the French Revolution rested not in the terrifying and violent events that actually occurred in Paris, but in the "enthusiasm" that those events generated in the eyes of sympathetic people all around Europe.⁴³ Similarly, Marxist Communists, living far from the actual context, remained devout proponents of the Communist ideal despite the atrocities committed within the Soviet Union. This disconnection between reality and perception is fetishism, according to Zizek. The more universalized our ethical system is, Zizek argues, the more brutal is our disavowal of the inconsistencies and the greater our exclusion of otherness becomes.⁴⁴

Interpreting the "Neighbour"

This is the greatest problem with liberal multiculturalism for Zizek. As an ideology it teaches that, to fully understand someone, you must understand the person as a totality—as a wholly human person with stories and feelings. The problem with this approach, Zizek argues, is that focusing upon the whole not only misses the details but misses the whole itself. Rather, following a psychoanalytic system, Zizek argues that one must tear apart the person's unity, focus

41 Zizek, "Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself," 24:00.

42 Zizek, "Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself," 28:00.

43 Zizek, "Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself," 29:00.

44 Zizek, "Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself," 32:00.

on one part of it in isolation, and then allow that particular element to colour the entire perspective. To truly understand others I must understand them in their more radical dimension.⁴⁵ To love my neighbour is to love his or her “dark abyss,” the radical otherness of the neighbour that I do not know anything about.⁴⁶ It is not to love the other because one perceives oneself (like a mirror-image) empathetically within them. Rather, according to Žižek, the original meaning of the Jewish ethical precept “enjoins you to love and respect your neighbor, [as] the neighbor qua traumatic Thing...[In this], Judaism opens up a tradition in which a traumatic kernel forever persists in my Neighbor—the Neighbor remains an inert, impenetrable enigmatic presence that hystericizes me.”⁴⁷

For Žižek, the neighbour is the one who confronts us with the Real (as opposed to the ideological construction of reality). The Real, exemplified by the post-apocalyptic reality behind the digital illusion of the world dramatized in the 1999 film *The Matrix*, is the disturbing reality that exists beyond all imaginations, symbols and language that humans ideologically construct to understand the world.⁴⁸ Realization of the Real occurs when reality confronts the illusions, fantasies and ideas (symbols) that we have developed, as when the illness of a beloved family member or a natural disaster ruptures our preconceived beliefs about how the world works. We create, adopt or maintain particular fantasies about the world, because fantasies help us give meaning to it. For example, the acts of sex or eating, when examined in their plain mechanics, are rather unpleasant things. However, it is our fantasies regarding these acts that make them transcend their reality. One’s desire for chocolate cake or a romantic liaison develops as a fantasy prior to experiencing them. Typically, our actual experiences of them are interpreted by these fantasies, which then support

45 Žižek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 35:00-36:00.

46 Žižek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 37:00.

47 Slavoj Žižek, “The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View,” *Studies in East European Thought* 56 (2008): 385-86; also see Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: or Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 101.

48 Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002).

the latter further. The Real, however, lays behind our fantasies, illusions and ideologies, and particular intense experiences or “events” will periodically tear through these fictions to reveal the raw reality of the universe.⁴⁹

Two theological examples: The first is the experience of Job. Zizek notes that, when at the end of the biblical narrative God finally confronts Job, Job does not find God to be a sublime benevolent intellect Job had expected and known. Rather, Job is confronted with an unknown side of God, revealing that God’s personality is greater and more complex than his followers typically understand. The same can be said for the incarnation of Christ, as second example. The Christ-event, Zizek argues, turns upside-down, inside-out, what humans have understood about God. In the Christ-event, we find the eternal reaching into the temporal, the “falling” of God (unlike humans who have fallen) so that he may rise again, and the permission for evil so that good may exist.⁵⁰

Like God to Job, the neighbour is a real but an ultimately unknowable person who has sides to their personality that we may never see, and that realization is disturbing. Our ideologies are confronted by an experience of the Real. Zizek argues that people are confronted with the Real, the truth, when all our shields against the Real are removed. Liberal multicultural tolerance, in contrast, functions as a shield protecting me from the Real of another. It is this radical otherness that disturbs me. When the neighbour comes too close, we react to rid ourselves of this intrusion.⁵¹ Their characteristics that are essentially unknowable to us (e.g., their different ethnicity, sexuality, ideologies, histories, or personalities) harass our experience. These unknowable aspects define their whole being, and in many cases we come to view characteristics different from our own as toxic.

Learning another’s stories does nothing to rid myself of this disturbing otherness. Mere stories do nothing to make that which is essentially unknowable, knowable. Zizek argues that we are discovering this truth more and more; as our ideologies are confronted by our ex-

49 Slavoj Zizek, *Event: a Philosophical Journey Through a Concept* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

50 Zizek, *Event*, 22-23.

51 Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 58, 63.

periences of the Real, we know that our current ideologies are ineffective.⁵² Our experiences of the Real are essential, and it is exactly our experiences of the Real that ideology endangers. The neighbour is the person who disturbs the field of my experience. This solution is that, since we cannot truly understand the other, we should not be overly concerned with trying to understand everyone at all. We do not need to understand each other, he asserts. Rather, we need more alienation of each other. We need a new social code of discretion.⁵³ The abyss of otherness is, therefore, the limitation of ethical universality. The liberal ethic of loving thy neighbour as oneself is actually impossible, for it leaves us living in a fear that is rooted in the unknown.⁵⁴

Zizek argues that, when Judaism and Christianity command us to “love thy neighbour,” they mean that one should love the terrifying dimension beneath those likable aspects of the neighbour with which we can find sympathy.⁵⁵ The “other” that multiculturalists want to tolerate is the “decaffeinated other”—products deprived of their poisonous substance.⁵⁶ Yes, Europe is in danger of losing its Judeo-Christian heritage, but not because of the arrival of new immigrant neighbours within European borders, but because of western-born ideologies which include liberal tolerance and ring-wing fundamentalism.

So, therefore, should we respect our neighbours and keep a distance? No! Zizek’s recipe for multicultural unity is for us to share in the same struggle. Zizek asserts: “I don’t want tolerance, I want struggle for the good cause.”⁵⁷ Elsewhere he writes: “A better formula would thus be: in spite of our differences, we can identify the basic antagonism of the antagonistic struggle in which we are both caught; so let us share our intolerance and join forces in the same struggle. In other words, it is not the cultures in their identity that join hands; it is the repressed, the exploited and suffering...that come together is

52 Zizek, “The Monstrosity of Christ,” 37:00.

53 Zizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 38:00-40:00.

54 Zizek, “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself,” 43:00.

55 Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 100.

56 Slavoj Zizek, interview by Riz Khan, Riz Khan Show, Al Jazeera, 11 November 2010. Online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIpiXJW3dYE, 10:00.

57 Zizek, interview by Riz Khan, 10:00

a shared struggle.”⁵⁸ True universality emerges out of violent breakthrough, not some neutral universal framework, because it is a unity based in our subjective experiences of not fully having freedom and identity.

One does not participate in some universal humanity through one’s “very particular ethnic identification.” Rather, one participates in the “universal function of humanity” precisely because the circumstances make one uneasy about fully identifying with any one particular ethno-cultural-religious identity (e.g., Jewishness).⁵⁹ Žizek argues that people participate in more universal human movements when their particular identifications are no longer “a safe haven to which [one] could withdraw.”⁶⁰ Only when one is uncomfortable with one’s own particular religio-ethnic-social-political identity does a person seek more universal human connections.

Žizek believes that the Arab Spring revolts proved his contention. In an interview on Al-Jazeera, Žizek supported the need for multicultural understanding but noted “how cheap or irrelevant all this multicultural talk becomes ... [for] when fighting a tyrant we are all universalists in solidarity with each other.”⁶¹ He continues: “This is how you build universal solidarity. Not through some stupid UNESCO multicultural project, but the struggle for freedom. Freedom is the universal proof against [the idea] that Muslims prefer some religiously fundamentalist dictatorship. What happened in Tunisia and Egypt is precisely that universal desire for dignity, human rights, economic justice; this is universalism at work.”⁶² Žizek exclaims: “Arabs got it! They are doing it better than we are doing it in the West with our anti-immigrant parties. What we see on TV rids the taint of the argument of the clash of civilizations. Once you fight totality with solidarity, there is no clash of civilizations.”⁶³

58 Žizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 674.

59 Žizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 674.

60 Žizek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category,” 675.

61 Tariq Ramadan and Slavoj Žizek, interview by Riz Khan, *Riz Khan Show*, Al Jazeera, 04 February 2011. Online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=29NffzEh2b0, 4:00.

62 Ramadan and Žizek, interview by Riz Khan, 5:00.

63 Ramadan and Žizek, interview by Riz Khan, 6:00.

Conclusions

There are a number of responses that could be offered in criticism of Zizek, and subsequently in defense of liberal multiculturalism and tolerance. First, on a subjective level Zizek's assessment of liberal multiculturalism appears valid, in that, politicians and media overemphasize the racial, religious and ethnic dimensions of sociopolitical conflict. Zizek, however, reduces our reaction to the unknown (ethno-religious) other as either hysteria or superficial empathy. Such bifurcation misses some important forms of human relationships that seem to transcend this simple division (e.g., multicultural and interfaith marriages and families). In fact, Zizek presents little empirical evidence to support his claims, which is not surprising as critical theorists seek to operate at the level of social metanarrative rather than an empirical level, and Zizek asserts that the purpose of philosophers is to ask questions and not to give answers.⁶⁴ All of this, however, makes one wonder if his criticism reflects a genuine insight into western societies or reveals personal sentiments about his own experiences.

Second, while “knowing thy neighbour's story” cannot ultimately reduce the existential unknowability of our relationships with others,⁶⁵ and that the postmodern focus on “narrative as truth” is rationally distasteful as much as it is relativistic, the rationale behind knowing thy neighbour's story is sound; coming from the social-political desire to reduce ignorance. The problem, then, is not really the methodology by which some of our sociopolitical institutions genuinely attempt to reduce the toxicity of the other, though certainly some approaches are better than others; the problem is with the widespread lack of motivation by individuals to reduce the interpersonal gap between others. The information is easy to access, and plenty of intercultural experiences are available, but people seem unmotivated to move beyond their ignorance in order to know their neighbour better.⁶⁶ This leaves interpersonal understandings and relations

64 Slavoj Zizek, “The Purpose of Philosophy is to Ask the Right Questions,” *Big Think*, 2013. Online: <http://bigthink.com/postcards-from-zizek/the-purpose-of-philosophy-is-to-ask-the-right-questions-video>.

65 See Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 89-120.

66 Westerners appear to react rather than act. They spend more time and effort

across cultures to capitalistically commoditized spheres of society, which utilize culture and multiculturalism for their own economic purposes (e.g., selling products, corporate branding or increasing media consumers).

Third, is tolerance essentially a negative virtue? Is it, as Wendy Brown asserts,⁶⁷ merely a way for the hegemonic power to deal with an undesirable element within society? Yes, in popular usage (even in the political sphere), tolerance has become a “warm-blanket” word that allows us to patronize the other group, keeping them at a distance. In fact, the concept of tolerance has become so ideologically definitive of the West that it is a crusading rationale for imperialism (i.e., the wholly and completely tolerant West must bring tolerance to the intolerant East), which usurps other projects of justice, egalitarianism, and freedom. Even still, tolerance has a long history in Anglo-American societies as a foundation for vital human and civil rights and should not be dismissed so easily.

The remaining question is whether Zizek’s criticism of liberal tolerance, and interpretation of “the neighbour,” is more consistent with Christian political thought. In the end, as theologian Marcus Pound notes well, Zizek challenges liberal tolerance’s ability to “decaffeinate” any commitment deeper than to its own ideology.⁶⁸ In particular, Pound asserts, Zizek argues that liberalism’s command to “enjoy”

on private or personal decisions than on public ones. For instance, while a North American will take hours researching for a car purchase, they will spend little time researching political issues or who to vote for, basing such choices on “gut” feelings believing them to be based on firm rational justifications (i.e., a rational ignorance). See Michael Allingham, *Choice Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). In my own field of research, religion and politics, an illustration of the continued ignorance of global religious traditions among U.S. citizens came from a 2010 poll by the Pew Center on Religion and Public Life, in which Americans averaged 50 percent on a general religious knowledge quiz. See Pew Center on Religion and Public Life, “U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey,” online: http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Belief_and_Practices/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf. In comparison to data from surveys done in other countries, the level of U.S. knowledge would likely be only a grade or two behind fellow western countries.

67 See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

68 Marcus Pound, *Zizek: a (very) critical introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 127-28.

(*jouissance*) their culture and religion, bears little difference from its command to enjoy through capitalistic consumerism. When one is given freedom to enjoy, the very opposite occurs. Pound likens it to Kierkegaard's idea that freedom creates anxiety, in that the awareness of absolute freedom does not liberate the soul but rather creates a terrifying realization that you are now obligated to choose. The same works for law, culture and religion for Zizek, Pound adds. For when one is given freedom to enjoy their religion, it subversively forces people to do the opposite; it blocks one's enjoyment.⁶⁹ Liberal tolerance reduces religion to a "set of culturally given practices within a more generalized economy," and in doing so it enculturates religion and robs it of its critical (prophetic?) role within society. A popular example of Zizek's is the place of Buddhism in liberal capitalistic societies. Instead of struggling to cope with a rapidly changing and materialistic society, western Buddhism tells its adherents to let go of the whole world, to detach themselves from it and drift along with it. In doing so, this allows the adherent to participate more fully in the capitalistic materialism of western societies.⁷⁰

For Zizek, Christianity is a legacy that is worth saving. The reasons are numerous and varied, but in his many discussions on Christianity and Christian theology, it is clear that he sees something unique within Christianity; even more so in Christ. Christ and Christianity are the anti-ideology, in that they are the destruction of all "big others" and "master signifiers" (i.e., great ideas that demand or inspire devotion and meaning). At the cross, one finds the destruction of all metaphysics and theologies, for God-himself dies. In doing so, Christ has resolved the anxiety caused by the unknowableness of God found in Judaism and Islam. The power of the Christ-event, and by "event" he means a "rupture in the normal run of things" or something that shatters our existing beliefs and ideologies upon which we found our worldviews, is that resurrection is not something that happened after Christ's death but it is the "obverse of death itself."⁷¹ The Christ-event is where God himself falls, where Eternity reaches into time, and

69 Pound, *Zizek*, 129.

70 Pound, *Zizek*, 130-31. See also Slavoj Zizek, *Event* (London: Penguin, 2014), 57-76.

71 Zizek, *Event*, 38.

ruptures any and all pre-existing classical beliefs about the gods and the world itself.⁷²

It is the modern market-driven liberal society, the dominant ideology of western societies, that Christianity challenges. The problem with contemporary liberal capitalistic societies is that they have destroyed any notion of the common good and public civil life in its normalization of radical subjectivity. Drawing from Hegel, Zizek argues that the success of the modern world has been in transforming civil society into “the domain in which autonomous human individuals associate with each other in order to satisfy their private needs: all communal ends are subordinated to the private interests of individuals.”⁷³ Such egoistic hedonism has become so pervasive, that public space has almost disappeared and actions that run contrary to our collectively assumed egoism are seen as deviant. Zizek notes how people pass other people on the street, each surrounded by a socially prescribed invisible buffer-zone isolated through personal media devices, and where couples can be intimate without fear of being bothered, because they are in their private space (despite it being in a park, on a beach, on a train, etc.) and the person who disturbs them is at fault for violating their privacy.⁷⁴ The real deviant, he argues, has become the person who ethically acts contrary to this accepted hyper-privatized and hedonistically egoistical world. For example, Zizek tells of a story from the Chinese government-run newspaper, the *People’s Daily*, where a young man was successfully sued by the family of an elderly woman who broke her hip when climbing onto a bus. Even though the young man had helped the woman get to the hospital, gave her some money, and waited for her family to arrive, the family charged that he did so out of guilt for hurting the woman and not out of charity. The judge agreed; against the assumed world-view of hedonistic egoism, the very thought of a genuine selfless act of charity was inconceivable.⁷⁵

72 Zizek, *Event*, 43-46.

73 Zizent, *Event*, 172-73.

74 Zizek, *Event*, 178.

75 Zizek, *Event*, 176.

So in a world where public space is dying, as our private space expands to include more of it, and our society is ethically guided by the ideology of hyper-individualistic market-liberalism, this ideology tells us to enjoy our religion and culture by making it into a privatized and commoditized set of practices that reduces Christian public ethics into a deviant expression and subtly coerces Christians into supporting its own moral-ethical vision. In doing so, it robs Christianity (and other religions) of its radical core and its critical force. Christians need to be in the public sphere, promoting an alternative ethic and struggling with others to create a just society. This does not mean that Christians need to abandon liberal democracy as a form of polity (agreeing here with Nicholas Wolterstorff),⁷⁶ but rather be critical and skeptical about dominant trends in liberal political theory that may threaten any genuinely Christian political theology.

76 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, edited by Terence Cuneo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Different But Not Less: A Theo-Political Critique of Slavoj Žižek's Autistic Subject

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At the core of *Living in the End Times*, an eclectic analysis of pop apocalypticism, political economics, and theology, Slavoj Žižek defends his Cartesian reading of “thinking and being” by conjuring up a ghastly figure of an autistic subject, whom he claims represents a form of “death in life” and the “zero-point” of subjectivity.¹ When looking an autistic subject “in the eye,” according to Žižek, you have the sense of looking in an “empty house” where you expect to find someone, but “no one is home”: “This then is the subject at its zero-level.”² Throughout Žižek’s work, this autistic subject appears as both a literal human with autism and also an allegorical subject position in global politics. The latter is found in the suicide bomber, whom Žižek reads as a symptom of the privatization, or “enclosing” of the commons, a condition that excludes the political animal from its “own substance.”³ Beside the alienated proletariat, and the “*totally ‘mediatized’ subject*” caught up in virtual reality, Žižek sees this third position as the post-traumatic subject, who is the formalization – form without content – of the modern subject par excellence: “to get an idea of the cogito at its purest, its ‘degree zero,’ one need only come face to face with an autistic ‘monster’ – a painful and disturbing spectacle.”⁴ For Žižek “the pure internality of the ‘autistic’ subject detached from external reality, disengaged, reduced to a persisting core deprived of all substance” is “the formal conversion of the pure

1 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2010), 312, 310, 312. This “zero” should not be read in light of Žižek’s thoughts on the “all and the non-all.”

2 Žižek, *End Times*, 313.

3 Žižek, *End Times*, 313.

4 Žižek, *End Times*, 314.

externality of the meaningless real.”⁵ This autistic monster represents the bare glimpse of subjectivity; it is a horror that rips open the texture of what we take for reality and demonstrates that the nothing that underlies substance out there is also lingering in the interior of the subject, and this is why Žižek claims that we resist “so adamantly the specter of the cogito.”⁶

Žižek’s analysis of the autistic subject in *Living in the End Times* is occasioned by his fundamental disagreement with fellow Hegelian Catherine Malabou about the nature of the subject’s emergence from the materiality of the brain. Malabou has attempted to draw philosophy and neuroscience together around the term “plasticity” which she has appropriated from Hegel’s introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Malabou, the mind, and consequently our psyches, is plastic in two ways: 1) it is malleable and can take new shape; 2) yet this does not us allow us infinite variability because *plastique* explodes, and ruptures the previous formal integrity, never to be revived.⁷ In her monograph, *The New Wounded*, Malabou considers brain injuries that emerge from this second attribute of brain plasticity. But, according to Žižek, she utilizes a hidden doctrine that seems identical to the Aristotelian/Thomist tenet “the soul is the form of the body,” a cardinal sin according to the born-again Cartesian.⁸ This is because Malabou does not persevere a strong gap between the material substratum of neuronal activity and the subject that emerges. Žižek claims that while analyzing the new subject that emerges after the event of a brain injury, Malabou forgets to include the form of

5 Žižek, *End Times*, 311.

6 Žižek, *End Times*, 314. Students of theology will recognize this as a sort of atheist Augustinian move whereby Augustine would find God/the real in the interior and the exterior.

7 Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 47.

8 Žižek, *End Times*, 303. Žižek is the one who first describes Malabou in Thomist terms: “However, insofar as Malabou continues to talk about the ‘cerebral unconscious’ as something more than such a blind self-regulatory process, she runs the risk of regressing to a pre-modern organicist-idealist figure of a spiritual Form inherent to matter as such (along the Aristotelian lines of the soul as the inherent form of a body). Is what she presents as her more radical materialism – there is no need for a specific psychic domain or level; the brain itself can reflect itself – not a covert re-spiritualization of matter?”

subjective recognition of the trauma – “the subject that is the positive form this loss assumes,” who, in Žižek’s mind, is best represented by an autistic subject.⁹ Thus, the crux of their disagreement is the centre piece of Žižek’s philosophical system, the fissure between material and psyche. This dualistic Cartesian subject must be conscious of his thought to exist as a subject.¹⁰ I want to argue that Malabou’s slippage from dualism to Thomism arises because she perceives what I perceive – that Žižek’s approach does not safeguard the dignity of the autistic subject (or any subject). The subject is not an image of God, but rather exemplifies the core of nothingness that shimmers under the fissure between “real” and “symbolic.” It is here that the poverty of Žižek’s critique is most clear, and it is on this figurative ground – the autistic subject – that a reproach to his thought is necessary for his Christian readers.

As students of allegory know, the secondary level of meaning, in this case the post-traumatic subject, does not remain hermetically sealed from the literal level, the neuroatypical subject, but bleeds back into it, creating a two way channel of semiotic development and change. One might reproach Žižek’s construction of autism through ethical registers, arguing that he offends subjects through this callous appropriation of an embattled signifier. I want to skirt this line of argument at first and consider primarily Žižek’s misreading of the autistic subject, and how this misreading demonstrates flaws in his fundamental philosophical doctrine that permeate his project. After clearing the ground of misconceptions, I will return to contend that the socio-political effect of *imago Dei*, the doctrine of being made in the image of God, is a necessity for the sort of emancipatory project that Žižek seeks to advance, and further, that we see the poverty of his approach most clearly by considering the autistic subject.¹¹

9 Žižek, *End Times*, 308.

10 This meditation on the figure of autism offers us a chance to enact an Augustinian reversal of the Cogito: “I think therefore I am.” Instead of positing ontology on interior knowledge, we should claim with Augustine: “If I am mistaken, therefore I am” (*City of God* XI.26). Ontology comes into view as we acknowledge the fault lines in our knowledge, and see depravity as a universal characteristic, and not just the property of an autistic monster.

11 It goes without saying that the Christian reader of Žižek must escape his somewhat totalizing system and break with his atheist reading of “the Big Other” not exist-

If, as I'm arguing, autism is operating on the level of fantasy for Žižek, is it correct to assume that his fantasy is perverted, that in the autistic other he instrumentalizes a fantastic supplement that upholds a faulty understanding of subjectivity? This false construction at once maintains a parallax gap between mind and body that excludes autistic subjectivity as impossible, forever the example of formal subjectivity with no content. This impossibility misconstrues the hyper-sensitivity that autistic subjects experience as emptiness. Hyper-sensitivity is caused by a disequilibrium of sensory perception – too much of the real, which provokes an excess of self-consciousness rather than the zero-level of subjectivity. Paradoxically, the key problem that lies behind Žižek's critique of autistic subjects is the idea that you look into their eyes and they have no empathy; they are blind to you, which Simon Baron-Cohen and others call "mindblindness."¹² But isn't Žižek responding with a similar deficiency? His approach lacks empathy for their subjectivity and cognition, and substitutes instead a reduced symbolic formulation of a self that fits nicely into a broader system. What is he blind to from this self-appointed position of power? What are we blind to?

When we see autism we see a puzzle and an umbrella. The puzzle is tattooed on bodies and embraced by families of autistic individuals, even while it is contested as a problematic trope by members of autism self-advocacy groups like Paula Durbin-Westby.¹³ Such groups remind us that Žižek is not the only one fantasizing about autism. These three registers of psychoanalysis – Real, Symbolic, Imaginary – are, I suppose it is banal to say, present wherever we look, even when our gaze falls on a condition like autism. Here the antagonism between the symbol and the referent continues. Westby exposes the stereotyping at work in representations of autism in popular fiction,

ing, without needing to do away with his valuable anti-Orwellian sociological insight: that we hyperbolize centralized power in order to internalize the barrier of the law.

12 Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 1-3.

13 It is Paula Durbin Westby who introduced me to the work of Gyasi Burks-Abbot that follows. She referenced Burks-Abbot in a now absent recording of a talk she gave while working with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network. Her website, which contains informative critiques of groups like Autism Speaks, can be found here: <http://paulac-durbinwestbyautisticblog.blogspot.ca/>.

particularly Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which tells the story of suburban divorce through the eyes of Christopher, a protagonist with autism. Gyasi Burks-Abbot, a literary critic with autism, claims that Haddon's fiction has become the new *Rain Man*, a shorthand for mastering the condition: "I once told a Harvard student I was autistic, and he was about to tell me that he had had a friend with the same condition until he realized he was thinking about Dustin Hoffman."¹⁴ Burks-Abbot's well-meaning colleagues and conversation partners, fed by Hollywood stereotyping, conclude that he must have "particular savant skills."¹⁵ Here the autistic subject is marginalized again by being considered different and exceptional. This assumption is the opposite end of the spectrum from Žižek, but equally problematic.

Autistic individuals like Burks-Abbot, who self-advocate, are the lifeblood of liberal democracy because they disturb the symbolic fictions that we circulate about those who are not typically heard, in this case, people with autism; not that some fictions do not in some sense tell the truth, simply, that they don't speak the whole truth (consider Žižek's claim that autistic subjects are "the subjective form of [neuro-nal] devastation itself").¹⁶ One of the limiting tropes for Burks-Abbot is that autistic individuals require mediation:

...in declaring that people like Christopher are unfathomable unless written about, as Haddon does in the epigraph..., at the same time claiming that Christopher would have trouble writing for himself, Haddon has relegated the autistic to otherworldliness while establishing a non-autistic author like himself as the necessary medium between autistic and non-autistic reality.¹⁷

14 Gyasi Burks-Abbott, "Mark Haddon's Popularity and Other Curious Incidents in My Life as an Autistic," *Autism and Representation*, ed. Mark Osteen (New York: Routledge, 2008), 295.

15 Burks-Abbott, *Autism and Representation*, 295.

16 Žižek, *End Times*, 308.

17 Burks-Abbott, *Autism and Representation*, 295.

When we consider this same problem of mediation as it appears in Žižek's formulation we see that it is not that autistic individuals need mediation, but that mediation is already an impossibility. Thus, between these two figurations autistic subjects are caught in a double bind. But the situation becomes more complicated if we try to follow Žižek's use of autism in his work precisely. In *The Parallax View*, as Žižek takes up "jouissance as a political category," autism functions as shorthand for solipsism, and it is equated with a willed apolitical stance:

...do not the commodified provocations to enjoy which bombard us all the time push us toward, precisely, an autistic masturbatory 'asocial' jouissance whose supreme case is drug addiction? Are drugs not at the same time the means for the most radical autistic experience of jouissance and a commodity par excellence?¹⁸

Here we are caught between the contradictory impulses to explain what Žižek means by autism, how it functions in his work, and how his reading of autism trips up his work. In the first case, autism functions, I would argue, as something like Lacan's algebraic symbols, yet not always consistently. As far back as *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) autism functions as it does in *End Times*, as the zero level of subjectivity.¹⁹ We see this meaning operative again in *The Monstrosity of Christ*.²⁰ However, as I mentioned above, it appears as a moral category in *The Parallax View*, a type of subjective vice that is derived equally from the solipsistic fears of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* as it is from Dante's vision of deluded subjects afflicted with *contrapasso*. In the first strain, autism is matched with the suicide bomber who is divested of the commons and alienated from his common ownership of the public; in the second, autism is matched to the drug addict, lost in subjective space. We could perhaps claim that the suicide bomber and the drug addict share a point of identity

18 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 311.

19 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2009), 75.

20 Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 77.

in alienation from politics, but the bomber represents the height of self-control, and the addict, complete loss of will. Setting aside for the moment questions of mental illness, even hysteria, we might see both of these figures as misconstruals of neurotypicals.²¹ In Žižek's hands autism is different and zero but the zero is filled with contradiction. Žižek's approach cannot take us beyond Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty.

For instrumental purposes then, I propose that we approach the figure of autism from a more humble perspective, by listening to autistic individuals; this is, after all, the central role of the analyst in the Lacanian tradition. A welcome interlocutor then is Temple Grandin, a concrete representative of autism, professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University, subject of HBO's recent biopic, *Temple Grandin*, and advocate for "nerds, geeks, and all sorts of autistic and aspergery people out there."²² Playing the analyst then, let us consider some of the complexity inherent in Temple Grandin's symbolic appearance, by interpreting the Temple that Claire Danes creates.

Danes's portrayal repeats a central slogan that Grandin uses as a popular philosophical touchstone, that autistic individuals are "different but not less."²³ This appears at a key point in the film, where Grandin is attending a conference on autism with her longsuffering mother, and listening to a psychologist describe autistic individuals inappropriately. She speaks up and contradicts his master narrative, and the audience listens because she is speaking from subjective experience of the condition. Grandin's central claim about autism throughout the HBO film is the same one she speaks in person: "I was different, but not less." Here she challenges Žižek's formulation of autism as the zero-level of subjectivity, by arguing for a different, yet capable form of subjectivity, a form of subjectivity under construction on a site labeled neuro-atypical. She claims that her ability to function on a high level is derived from her mother's regime of establishing

21 If Žižek is writing about neurotypicals and not neuroatypical when he uses the term "autistic subject," he does nothing in the surrounding context to clarify this equivocal stance.

22 Temple Grandin, "TED Talk: The World Needs All Kinds of Minds," *You Tube*: https://youtu.be/fn_9f5x0f1Q (accessed Nov 6, 2015).

23 *Temple Grandin*, Directed by Mick Jackson (HBO, 2010).

normative behaviour and her routine of acquiring a database of neurotypical responses to emotion, which she plays in her mind like flash cards and youtube clips. These help her to create anticipatory models of human behavior. She represents a classic form of what Simon Baron-Cohen calls mind-blindness, which involves a lack of normative empathy for human behavior.²⁴ As Grandin tells it, she does not lack the emotions that lead to a smile, just the native ability to interpret these emotions from another's face or voice. Danes/Grandin claims "I know there are a lot of things that I don't understand, but I still want my life to be meaningful."²⁵

I contend that her message of "different but not less," if heard, demands a reconfiguration of the socio-political reception of such neuro-atypical individuals, but the equation relies on the idea that any individual has an inherent value. This value must exceed subjective acknowledgement – it must be a real presence – seen at once in the leper beyond the wall of the civitas and the human being hanging on a cross. Ironically, this celebration of marginality is what draws Žižek to the "lost cause" of Christianity, with the exception that his Christ, the monstrous meeting point of universal and particular, is nothingness. Christian nothingness, however, is shaped by *kenosis* (self-emptying) and transcendence. The nothing is a coincidence with something. It is at this juncture that Žižek's Christ and his monstrous autistic subject need to shake hands, and perhaps explore the holes in his side. Understood symbolically, the holes in the resurrected body of Christ are both signifying remnants of his willingness to be made nothing on the Cross and contained memories of his mortal body that are held in the promise and realization of his infinite being. The Christian doctrine of *imago Dei* contains the whole of human history and its "tarrying with the negative," the negation of the good, in the promise of the trinity's infinite glory and dignity. Being made in the image of God, when translated into Grandin's pragmatic socio-political slogan – different but not less – reminds us of the univocal sharing of God's image that all subjects reflect, yet held in analogical tension with the God-head. The human is different and less, but this lesser

24 Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 141.

25 *Temple Grandin*, Directed by Mick Jackson (HBO, 2010).

quality is internalized and deified in the glory of the second person of the trinity. The position that Žižek assumes has the effect of allowing for his position as writer to slip from the univocal sharing of equal dignity with others to the different and more position of God. Further, his atheistic formulation of the autistic subject also betrays the Feuerbachian heritage of the Lacanian-Hegelian genealogy by undermining the positive political effect that even the “image of humanity projected against the sky” may have, whether understood as fiction (atheism) or analogy (theism).

So how do we think through cognitive difference within the set of those who bear the image of God? How do we address neuroatypicals with an understanding of different modes of cognition, sensory perception, and sociality? And further, what can Žižek learn from autism? Without exhausting the subject, there are three points where the autistic subject speaks back to Žižek, if he will listen: 1) concrete universality; 2) how not to be a master; 3) the poverty of atheistic Cartesianism in interpreting human dignity. Much of this critique is aimed at ‘hacking into’ Žižek’s Cartesianism because his narrative of the decentred subject is much more useful to contemporary Christian theological projects than any naïve idea of the self-contained autonomous actor of classical liberalism. To be useful, however, we need to draw the pathways between Žižek’s decentered subject and the Augustinian move that he flirts with through his work.

First, what Grandin calls thinking in pictures is what Žižek, following Hegel, calls concrete universality. Grandin uses a thought experiment to illustrate the difference between autistic forms of cognition and those taken for granted by neurotypicals:

Most people don’t think in pictures to the extent that I do. I have a little test, I ask people to access their memory of church steeples. Most people get a vague generalized steeple. I see specific ones. The steeple next door, or the weird round one with shingles on it. Cinder block. Square. For the general concept of steeples, I have to look at a lot of specific ones. They don’t have transmitters on them, so they are not cellphone towers. They are on

houses of worship. So a steeple is [a] high structure on a house of worship. That's how I categorize it.²⁶

Grandin's understanding of thinking in pictures does not have a buried metaphysical claim attached. She is not attempting to undercut Platonism per se, but perhaps to chart a different way of ascending to the pragmatic universal through concrete particulars. It leads one to wonder whether Hegel has some insight into autistic cognition when he theorized the concrete particular in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (does the Hegelian project make possible a re-situation of the autistic subject?). And further, Grandin's account of autism suggests that cognition is itself caught in a parallax gap between the Platonic form of the universal, which I would argue is normative for neurotypicals, and the concrete universal, which is a native form of cognition for autistics. Why choose between two? Why should we speak univocally about cognition when it seems instead that we are being presented with an alternate process at work in human minds?

I have been attempting to formulate an answer to the second question, "how not to be a master," throughout this paper. This particular knowledge-power constellation, or vice, is not new to psychoanalysis with Žižek. Paul Verhaeghe outlines in detail the ways in which he sees Freud having become seduced by the distortions of power over his subject, abandoning the central purpose of a confidant. He claims that Freud abandoned his status of analyst as he published his study of Dora, a female hysteric, perennially trapped from becoming "woman."²⁷ Freud ceased to be the pupil, learning always from the hysteric subject before him, and assumed the position of the Master, "the one who knew."²⁸ "Freud the seeker who [sic] we met in *The Studies* and in the correspondence with Fliess, had been transformed into the Freud-who-knew... Obviously, Freud had taken

26 Temple Grandin, "Q&A: Temple Grandin on Autism & Language," *NPR*, last modified July 09, 2006, accessed Nov 6, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5488844>.

27 Paul Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist: From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine* (New York: Other Press, 1997), 55-66.

28 Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist*, 57.

a new position: that of the master.”²⁹ Verhaeghe’s critical approaches to the problem of slipping from analyst to master is reminiscent of Christ’s antagonism toward the Pharisees of the gospels, wherein the kernel of critique focuses on the attitude one takes toward knowledge. In both negative examples knowledge is used, now using the words of Paul, to “puff up,” to distort one’s social position.

When we consider Lacan’s four discourses – Master, University, Hysteric, Analyst – we find that his oppositional counterpoint to the Master is the Analyst.³⁰ Where the master enacts power through knowledge, the analyst seeks to restore a sense of agency to the powerless. Žižek’s approach more generally claims the analyst’s position in discourses of economics and politics. Even his engagement with underdog ideologies that are usually neglected or treated as straw men by the mainstream academy reflects the stated aim of the analyst. His formulation of the autistic subject, however, approaches autism as the master, encoding it exclusively by the norms of neurotypicality and damning the excess that does not fit into his formula. To approach autism like an analyst, who focuses on the excess that is excluded, one would need to unsettle this easy equation of autism with zero. This, by consequence, would reframe his formulation of the post-traumatic subject.

To rewrite the equation “Autism = Zero” we may have to abandon an Hegelian conception of negation. It seems as though Malabou has moved along this line, conceiving of neurological damage as creating different positivities rather than privations of ideal minds. The mind after trauma, say a stroke, is not negated but transformed. Certainly the past iteration of the mind cannot be identically recreated, but the form has not been erased by absolute negativity. It has instead transformed into another mode of positivity. One often hears anecdotes from parents of children on the autism spectrum who claim that their child was normal until a specific period of development when affect and behavior deviated from neurotypical development

29 Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist*, 56.

30 For more on the four discourse see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Book XVII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1991), 11-38; and Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist*, 95-122.

milestones. We should ask though whether this type of narrative, which relies on the negation of a neurotypical subject resulting in a neuroatypical subject, is at all helpful? Would it not be more beneficial to begin to think of cognition as having multiple positive mature forms, fitting more in line with the theory of multiple intelligences?

Grandin's narrative of development suggests that what Žižek perceives as the zero-level of subjectivity, the solipsistic autistic monster, is a reaction to a period of overstimulation that can be transcended through therapy. Indeed, she invents a squeeze machine, a do-it-yourself-built compression instrument that helps her self-regulate and regain the ability to interact calmly. Does this seem like the work of "an autistic subject detached from external reality, disengaged, reduced to a persisting core deprived of all substance," as Žižek puts it?³¹ As I've discussed before, Grandin's act of making, even the act of "flapping," is already the sign of a subjectivity conscious of sensory overload, attempting to regain stability.

Should we not assume, then, that Žižek's approach to autism introduces excessive noise in his own work, creating an unfathomable gap between his figure of autism and autistic subjects? I have been arguing that Žižek's application of negativity, which inscribes into waking conditions the "night of the real" in the form of Freud's "death drive," does not properly address the neurotypical/atypical antagonism. Further, this Cartesian approach to autism leaches dignity from subjects who can otherwise become contributors to new insights into human cognition, and may lead us to reconsider the western philosophical tradition with neuroatypicality in mind. As readers of Žižek's engagements with Christianity know, whether in his book length treatments, *The Monstrosity of Christ* and *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, or his considerations in other works, Žižek has often grappled with the tradition with admiration. He has particularly celebrated the "radicalizing" function of truth, the Christian notion of love, and the question of the neighbour, and offered a compelling dialectical analysis of the trinity. But nowhere is his approach more clearly at odds with Christianity than when he theorizes the monstrous autistic subject. There is a general sense of *sympatico* between Žižek's

31 Žižek, *End Times*, 311.

Marxist identification with “the people” and Christ’s injunction to care for “the least of these,” but the revolutionary dialectic has to do with assuming power through force, coercion, or eventful economic surprise. Christian subjectivity, if thought of politically, praises self-expression and provocative rhetoric (as the finale of David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite* reinforces), but Christ’s actions in response to Peter’s severing of the soldiers ear and his silence before Pilate both indicate how contrary the political field of subjectivity is to Christian subjectivity when it comes to laying claims to power.³² Palm Sunday’s satire of the kingly procession and Christ’s ironic dismissal of the empire’s claim to taxes – “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” – both play with the antecedent of subjectivity. Whose subject are you, Caesar’s or God’s? It is this antecedent that is ‘foundational’ in the doctrine of *imago Dei*.³³ Here we have room to play with cognition, for scripture tells us “my thoughts are not your thoughts,” implying that while we may project a beautiful mind toward the heavens, God may very well have more in common with autistic cognition than he does with neurotypicals. God certainly doesn’t need to use abstractions as a method of accessing particulars, for that approach is a stopgap for finite beings who cannot field the particulars in their particularity. We know from the detailed renderings of city skylines that Stephen Wiltshire produces from memory that our best human approximation of a God’s eye view comes from an autistic man.³⁴ The theo-political critique of Žižek that I’ve been extending here is in defense of the dignity of the autistic subject, which Žižek’s system has no method of maintaining. The fields of dignity that arrive from conceiving of subjectivity through the analogical interplay of *imago Dei* must be internalized into his project, and it is doubtful that any secular apparatus of rights, privileges, or obligations

32 David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004), 413-444.

33 I mean this in the sense that an infinite being can be foundational in an analogical configuration, as for example in Hart’s reference to God as an “abyss of divine love” (*The Beauty of the Infinite*, 359).

34 “Autistic artist Stephen Wiltshire draws spellbinding 18ft picture of New York from memory . . . after a 20-minute ride over city” (DailyMail.com, Published October 29, 2009; Accessed November 8, 2015; online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1223790/Autistic-artist-draws-18ft-picture-New-York-skyline-memory.html>).

would be as effective at winning hearts and minds as being told you are made in the image of God, despite their legal framework or tradition. This perhaps is the reason why so many European philosophers (Badiou, Kristeva, Nancy, Vattimo, Habermas, and Žižek) have been circling around the corpse of Christ in search of techniques for intervening in secular publics. Secular publics may have the legal forms to enact protection, but it is the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei* that represents a much more fulsome and rich sense of dignity.

Annabel Lyon's historiographical metafiction *The Golden Mean* is instructive here. Her novel explores the role of philosophy in contemporary life by considering the relationship between Aristotle, Alexander the Great, and his autistic brother Philip. While Aristotle has to assume the position of the master vis-a-vis Alexander (who won't respect him otherwise), with Philip (and his father) his therapy takes the more "motherly" role of the analyst, who proceeds in cautious, fragmented form, as he teaches Philip to ride a horse and speak properly. Perhaps this sort of Aristotelian turn is one that offers us a liberating flexibility, one that enacts differing modes of therapy and engagement for subjects who are different but not less. For without this re-evaluation of approach, we run the risk of perpetuating the myth of the "autistic monster."

Embedded Existence: Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Ecological Anthropology

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In his famous and provocative 1967 article “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. points to Christian belief as a major historical cause of the ecological crisis. As a historian of technology, White recognized that destructive practices toward nature preceded the rise of the industrial revolution, but feeding both was the religion of Christianity, with its roots in the Hebrew Bible. Christianity provided the basic worldview of the west that allowed for the rise of technology and the belief in progress that led to destructive environmental practices. In fact, White points to the first chapters of Genesis as the root of this problem. He provides the following interpretation:

By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in the image of God. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.¹

1 “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA:

Modern destructive practices have their roots in the anthropology of Genesis, especially the notions of dominion and the image of God. This is no small complaint, and providing an answer to such charges against Christianity is an urgent task for theology—especially since the ecological crisis is the most important issue facing western civilization.

This anthropocentric charge against Christianity has been a central focus of political theologies of nature. Some political theologians of nature agree with White, while others argue he misreads the Bible and the complexity of the western tradition, while still others seek out a more comprehensive constructive theology.² In this paper, the focus will be on the constructive approach. The charge of anthropocentrism will be answered by examining the theological interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 found in the theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, with the purpose of developing an anthropology for a fuller political theology of nature. First, however, something of the larger theological response that is needed should be noted.

I. Anthropology within the Community of Creation

Besides the charge of anthropocentrism against Christianity, there are a variety of other critiques brought against Christian theology in light of ecological concerns. Steven Bouma-Prediger summarizes these charges under four tendencies. In first place, the monotheism of Christianity and Judaism calls on humans to have dominion

Addison-Wesley, 1973): 25. This is a reprint of “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March, 1967): 1203-07. Some of the articles in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics* respond to White, though most books in Christian environmental ethics deal with White’s charge in some way or another. Perhaps the most thorough response to White, focusing on the biblical material, is the neglected volume of the Canadian scholar Cameron Wybrow, *The Bible, Baconism, and Mastery over Nature: The Old Testament and Its Modern Misreading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); for a history of Christian thought which takes White’s charges seriously see Paul Santmire’s *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985).

2 For an introduction to political theologies of nature see Stephen Bede Scharper, *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (Contium: New York, 1998); on the variety of responses to White, see 22ff. For a more constructive and philosophically astute political theology of nature see Peter Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

over the earth, which can be destructively interpreted as suggested by White above.³ Some would also argue that monotheism, with its belief in a transcendent God, could lead to views that see humans as transcendent from nature, especially if they are to image God. Similarly, Jürgen Moltmann argues that Karl Barth's view of God as a single subject is too monarchical and could lead to unnecessary and unhelpful hierarchical notions.⁴ A second tendency focuses on the dualism between body and soul found in Christian belief and practice. Some forms of Christianity emphasize the soul over the body, and so could lead to notions of spirit and culture over and above matter and nature.⁵ Both Bonhoeffer and Barth recognize this, especially Bonhoeffer, who calls for positive views of human embodiment. A third group of concerns point out that historically Christianity has been complicit in the rise of modern science and technology; this was one of the main purposes in White's provocative paper. Fourth, certain forms of Christian eschatology lead to earth-denying views. If, for example, as popularized in the *Left Behind* theology, humans will be raptured from the earth as it is destroyed, then there is little need to care for creation.⁶

These critiques of Christian theology cover a large range of beliefs, from the doctrine of God to eschatology. It could easily be argued, then, that what is needed is a systematic political theology of nature that takes up the concerns of the ecological crisis while explicating the full range of Christian doctrines.⁷ While such a full

3 Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 60.

4 Jürgen Moltmann, "Creation, Covenant and Glory: A Conversation on Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation" in *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM Press, 1991): 125-42.

5 Moltmann, "Creation, Covenant and Glory," 60-61.

6 Moltmann, "Creation, Covenant and Glory," 61-63.

7 Two recent collections have begun this process; though they are written by groups of scholars and so do not have consistent theological programs, they contain invaluable pieces by leading scholars: *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives*, eds. Michael Northcott and Peter Scott (London: Routledge, 2014) and *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, eds. Ernst Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Dean-Drummond and Denis Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

response is obviously beyond the scope of this article, I would like to suggest the metaphor of the ‘community of creation’ could be a guiding motif in such an endeavor. In his largely exegetical work *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Richard Bauckham searches for a number of images or metaphors to describe creation, and especially the relation of God, humans, and nature. As the subtitle suggests, he settles on the image of the theocentric community of creation or community of creatures. Bauckham describes it in the following:

All God’s creatures are first and foremost creatures, ourselves included. All earthly creatures share the same Earth; and all participate in an interrelated and interdependent community, oriented above all to God our common Creator. It is a community of hugely diverse members whose mutual relationships are therefore enormously rich and diverse.⁸

Envisioning all of nature as community has the advantage of not only recognizing the difference and diversity, but also the reciprocity and interdependence of nature, including humans. It also recognizes not only fierce competition but perhaps even greater co-operation between creatures and natural environments.

More than being a viable theological concept, as Bauckham takes pains to demonstrate, modern “ecological science is constantly revealing more and more of the complex balance and flux of interrelationships within the biosphere of the Earth and its component ecosystems.”⁹ In fact, as Bauckham notes, the image has its roots in modern conservationism. The metaphor of the community of creation then has both theological and scientific support.¹⁰

8 Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 64.

9 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 64.

10 There are other metaphors that have their root in the Bible and tradition as well. For example, both John Calvin and Karl Barth preferred to describe creation as a theatre. I would argue, however, that such a description focuses on the drama between God and humanity and implies a passive role for the rest of nature, whereas the idea

To demonstrate the full advantages of this motif would require an exposition of the doctrines of God, creation, reconciliation, and redemption.¹¹ In this article, however, the focus will be on anthropology, a key topic in the doctrine of creation. Specifically, I want to explore how theological anthropology might respond to the need for what Philip Jenkins terms “ecological subjectivity.” Rather than focusing on nature in and of itself or focusing exclusively on human agency, ecological subjectivity attempts to strike a balance by thinking of how human “agents and environments are . . . reflexively related.”¹² Ecological subjectivity clearly takes account of human existence in the community of creation.

Another way of putting this is to suggest that theological anthropology needs to account for both human embodiment and human embeddedness. Embodiment, on the one hand, refers to a holistic description of human nature. We now recognize that definitions of human nature must resist dualistic or reductionist tendencies that describe the essence of human nature as an immortal soul, reason, or a spiritual capacity. Both Bonhoeffer and Barth call for human embodiment. Embeddedness, on the other hand, looks outward and asks how humans are fundamentally related and dependent on their natural environments in reciprocal ways. Embodiment states that we are made of the same stuff as the rest of nature, while embeddedness speaks to our interdependence with the rest of nature. Embodiment and embeddedness, moreover, could compliment and critique some of the ways that the *imago Dei* and human dominion have been interpreted.

Using the categories of embodiment and embeddedness, I will critically and constructively examine Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s view of the image of God as presented in his lectures *Creation and Fall*. Here he revolutionizes the concept of the image of God with his use of

of community commends reciprocity between humans and nature.

11 See the beginning of such a conversation with Barth’s doctrine of God in Adrian Langdon, “Jesus Christ, Election and Nature: Revising Barth During the Ecological Crisis,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68/4 (Fall 2015): 451-68.

12 Philip Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: OUP, 2008), 54.

the *analogia relationis*.¹³ The image of God for Bonhoeffer refers to a particular set of relationships in which humans are placed, often expressed in personalist terms as an I-You encounter, whether divine to human or human to human. It will be argued that the *analogia relationis* needs to be expanded to include the rest of non-human nature. While Bonhoeffer insists that humans are embodied creatures, they are material and earthly, his understanding of how humans are related to the rest of nature, how we are ecologically embedded, needs to be more fully developed.¹⁴ To supplement Bonhoeffer I will refer to Karl Barth's exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2, which comes closer to suggesting humans as embedded creatures. Lastly, I will explore this extension by reflecting on nature as "You" or "other" in which humans exist in dependent and reciprocal relationship. This will outline a broader view of the image of God in which humans are in fundamental relation to God, other humans, and the rest of nature; as full citizens in the community of creation.

13 The *analogia relationis* is often attributed to Barth, though he actually adopts and modifies it from Bonhoeffer.

14 Peter Scott highlights how embodiment is included along with sociality in Bonhoeffer's anthropology; see "Christ, Nature, Sociality: Dietrich Bonhoeffer for an Ecological Age," *SJT* 54:4 (2000), 416 ff. However, he also suggests that nature and embodiment for Bonhoeffer generally refer to humanity and not the material world as such. This perhaps arises from thinking of nature christologically and in the doctrine of reconciliation rather than in the doctrine of creation (*Ibid.*, 423ff). I agree there is an ambiguity in Bonhoeffer on the relation between humanity and the rest of nature, what we are calling embeddedness, but in *Creation and Fall* he does make the attempt to think of the relationship between God, humanity, and nature. Scott is right, however, to call for a view of nature in the full narrative of God's creating, reconciling, and redeeming activity, wherein "the understanding of nature in Bonhoeffer needs to be broadened: nature-human relations encompass not only human embodiment but also the physical world. Nonetheless, this must be done holding to Bonhoeffer's insight that Christ is present, if hidden, as the centre of nature. Christ emerges from the natural-social order, and yet is the initiator and reality of a new natural-social order" (426-27). Benjamin Burkholder, however, perhaps reads too much into Bonhoeffer when he interprets him to suggest that embodied existence means a service and freedom for the natural world. While we can extend Bonhoeffer in such a direction, he actually does not do so himself (see Burkholder, "Christological Foundations for an Ecological Ethic: Learning from Bonhoeffer," *SJT* 66 (3): 338-56, especially 343-45).

II. Being-in-Relation: Bonhoeffer on the *Imago Dei*

Bonhoeffer was one of the first theologians in the last century to develop a relational view of the *imago Dei*. Rather than identifying the image of God as a spiritual or intellectual capacity that humans possess, Bonhoeffer is important for thinking of humans in their basic relationships as key in understanding this doctrine. As a counter to Lynn White Jr.'s charge the focus will be on Bonhoeffer's lectures on Genesis 1 and 2.

Clifford Green has carefully argued that all of Bonhoeffer's theology can be formally characterized as a theology of sociality.¹⁵ This does not mean starting with a presupposed social theory and understanding Christianity within it, but rather interpreting theological doctrines such as God, creation, humanity, sin, and the church in social and relational terms.¹⁶ In fact, the starting point for this theology is Christology, since for Bonhoeffer the incarnation means that "God's being is being-in-relation-to-us."¹⁷ Green summarizes the implications: "human existence is also fundamentally relational. To be human is to be a person before God, and in relation to God. The relation of individual persons to each other, and relations between human communities of persons, has this theological understanding of God and human persons at its core."¹⁸

Bonhoeffer's relational anthropology also has a fundamentally ethical dimension. Persons, as Green notes, are "independent, willing subjects who exist in relation to others. They encounter each other by

15 This approach is found in his early dissertations, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, but also presupposed right up to his prison writings. See especially Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). For what follows I am using Clifford Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 113-33.

16 As Green puts it, "because being-Christian is life-in-church-community, so this communal-social paradigm informs Bonhoeffer's thinking about human sociality generally" ("Human Sociality," 114).

17 Green, "Human Sociality," 114. Or as Bonhoeffer puts it in *Creation and Fall*, the basis for this conception of "freedom for others in relation," this *analogia relationis*, is God's revelation in Christ. The Gospel proclaims that "God's freedom has bound itself to us, that God's free grace becomes real with us alone, that God will not be free for God's self but for humankind" (63).

18 Green, "Human Sociality," 115-16.

making ethical claims upon one another.”¹⁹ This ethical claim of the other arises from the experience of the other as a limit or boundary (*Grenz*) of my own existence, as they are also an independent and willing subject. When I encounter another will I am obligated to respond and to be accountable to this ethical claim (*Verantwortlichkeit*, “answerability”).²⁰

This relational and social interpretation of theology is evident in Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of *imago Dei* as found in *Creation and Fall*. Bonhoeffer rejects notions of the image of God as a substance or quality that humans possess – whether reason, an immortal soul, or spiritual capacity – and begins instead by reflecting on freedom. The created freedom of humanity is a “freedom for,” expressed in Genesis 1 with the creation of man and woman. Freedom is not a quality or capacity that humans have but “a relation and nothing else. To be more precise, freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means “being-free-for-the-other” because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.” Moreover, there is a “dependence on the other that their creatureliness consists” of. It is an existence of “human beings over-against-one-another, with-one-another, and in-dependence-upon-one-another.”²¹ This interpretation of the *imago Dei* is categorized as an *analogia relationis* rather than an *analogia entis*.²² The way in which humans are like God, their existence becoming analogous to God’s existence, is through imaging or mirroring relationship. Just as God is for humans in Christ, so humans are for each other.²³ It is important to note the

19 Green, “Human Sociality,” 115-16.

20 Green, “Human Sociality,” 115-16.

21 Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62-64. One might question whether the notion of freedom might not also apply to animals, which were created before humans and have their own dominion. Perhaps it is this limited notion of freedom that prevents from opening up nature as the other. Are not humans contained by the laws of nature, time, and biology like other animals?

22 The *analogia entis*, as Bonhoeffer sees it, would mean the existence for humans in-and-of-themselves, which is not possible since only God in his aseity has being-in-and-of-itself. But humans cannot have this likeness because they are created and dependent creatures (*Creation and Fall*, 64-66).

23 This analogy of relations is something in which humans are set; they are simply given it. In other words, the “relation of creature with creature is a relation estab-

direction of this analogy of relation. For Bonhoeffer, God's relationship with humans is the original archetypal relation, while the relation of humans to one another is the secondary ectypal relation.²⁴

Following this, Bonhoeffer expounds the concept of dominion. It is here that Bonhoeffer's interpretation becomes problematic, although it is not without promise. The problem with his view is that he defines human dominion as humanity being "free from" nature, which is contrasted with humans being "free for" God and one another.²⁵ Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer qualifies "freedom from" with reference to human embodiment and the intimate connection with nature humans have. "Freedom from" is not dualistic or Gnostic, it is not "the spirit's being free from nature." Rather this freedom includes "being bound to the creatures who are ruled. The ground and the animals over which I am lord constitute the world in which I live, without which I cease to be. It is my world, my earth, over which I rule. . . . in my whole being, in my creatureliness, I belong wholly to this world; it bears me, nurtures me, holds me."²⁶ But this bonding is not yet "freedom for" and the freedom to serve the rest of creation. Humans are still only embodied creatures, in other words.²⁷

lished by God, because it consists of freedom and freedom comes from God" (*Creation and Fall*, 66). What is more, God's creating free creatures who may glorify and worship God is a work of the Holy Spirit. Human freedom is simultaneously a divine work and a human work. As Bonhoeffer explains, "In the free creature the Holy Spirit worships the Creator; uncreated freedom glorifies itself in view of created freedom. The creature loves the Creator, because the Creator loves the creature. Created freedom is freedom in the Holy Spirit, but as created freedom it is humankind's own freedom" (*Creation and Fall*, 64).

24 The language of archetype and ectype is used by Bruce McCormack in reference to Barth's *analogia fidei*, though it is helpful here in describing Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* as well; see McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17.

25 McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 66.

26 McCormack, *Barth*, 66.

27 Burkholder's interpretation of Bonhoeffer errs here when he suggests that for Bonhoeffer the bond between humans and other creatures means serving other creatures and freedom for them; see "Christological Foundations for an Ecological Ethic," 343ff. As we will note below, Bonhoeffer maintains that humans are free from nature; however, it will become obvious that Bonhoeffer can be extended in a more ecologically responsible direction, which this paper argues.

Nevertheless, there are hints that Bonhoeffer does think of humanity in relation to nature in more complex terms. For example, when reflecting on humanity's separation from nature via modern technology he reasons that the root cause is that:

We do not know the world as God's creation and do not accept the dominion we have as God-given but seize hold of it ourselves. There is no 'being-free-from' without a 'being-free-for.' There is no dominion without serving God; in losing the one humankind necessarily loses the other. Without God, without their brother and sisters, human beings lose the earth. ... God, the brother and sister, and the earth belong together. For those who have once lost the earth ... there is no way back to the earth except via God and our brother and sisters.²⁸

Here Bonhoeffer hints at a more comprehensive set of relationships between God, humanity, and nature. Given the direction of divine grace, the proper relation begins with God's reaching humanity in Christ, which is then reflected in human to human relations, and finally the human to nature relationship. But humans have lost dominion and their proper relation to nature because they have lost their relation to God. A proper relation of humans to nature can only come when humans are reconciled to God. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer does not go far enough to suggest that humans are "free for" the rest of nature. As creatures within the community of creation, we need to characterize the human to nature relation as a "freedom for" that includes being over-against, with, and in dependence-on.

To Bonhoeffer's credit, he clearly does not view humans as autonomous or in abstraction from nature, but as embodied creatures. This is most clear in the section "The Human Being of Earth and Spirit," which expounds Genesis 2:7 where Yahweh fashions the hu-

28 Burkholder, "Christological Foundations," 67. "Technology is the power with which the earth seizes hold of humankind and masters it. And because we no longer rule, we lose the ground [Boden] so that the earth no longer remains our earth, and we become estranged from the earth."

man “from the dust of the ground.”²⁹ In fact, it is only in this embodied existence that humans are the *imago Dei*, in relation to God, each other, and the earth.³⁰ Nevertheless, we clearly need to broaden the *imago Dei* to include embeddedness as well.

III. Humanity within the Cosmos and Garden: Barth’s Exegesis of Genesis 1-2

Instead of turning to Karl Barth’s anthropology found in *CD* III/2, this section will turn to Barth’s theological exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 found in *Church Dogmatics* III/1 in order to fill in some of the lacuna found in our criticism of Bonhoeffer.³¹ I will title Barth’s exegesis of Genesis 1 as “The Cosmos as God’s Dominion,” while Genesis 2 will be titled “Service in the Garden.” His interpretation of both

29 Bonhoeffer interprets the passages as follows, “Humankind is derived from a piece of the earth. Its bond with the earth belongs to its essential being. The ‘earth is its mother’; it comes out of her womb. . . . It is God’s earth out of which humankind is taken. From it human beings have their bodies. The body belongs to a person’s essence. The body is not the prison, the shell, the exterior, of a human being; instead a human being is a human body. A human being does not ‘have’ a body – or ‘have’ a soul; instead a human being ‘is’ body and soul” (*Creation and Fall*, 76-77). He also suggests that even “Darwin and Feuerbach could not use stronger language than is used here” (p. 76). Or, in describing the blessing of humans to be fruitful and multiply, to fill and subdue the earth, Bonhoeffer suggests that it “is humankind’s whole empirical existence that is blessed here, its creatureliness, its worldliness, its earthiness” (68).

30 “For in their bodily nature humans beings are related to the earth and to other bodies; they are there for others and are dependent upon others. In their bodily existence human beings find their brother and sisters and find the earth. As such creatures human beings of earth and spirit are ‘like’ God, their Creator” (*Creation and Fall*, 79). Bonhoeffer argues in this section that the breath of life given to the human is the Spirit of God. It follows, then, that “The human body differs from all non-human bodies in that it is the form in which the spirit of God exists on earth, just as it is altogether identical with other all other life in being earth-like. The human body really does live only by God’s spirit; that is what constitutes its essential being” (78-79).

31 It must be noted that Bonhoeffer’s relational interpretation of the *imago Dei* was influential on Barth’s anthropology, as Bonhoeffer’s lectures *Creation and Fall* were published prior to Barth’s anthropology volume (so we are justified in putting Bonhoeffer before Barth). The major difference is that Barth’s anthropology is more thoroughly developed, especially in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ’s two natures, which, unfortunately, we are neglecting in this article.

chapters moves beyond embodiment and closer to embeddedness, all the while resisting anthropocentrism.³²

The Cosmos as God's Dominion (Genesis 1)

In Barth's exposition of Genesis 1, we find a theocentric yet ecologically affirming vision of the cosmos.³³ That is, he resists anthropocentric interpretations and suggests that humans are thoroughly embedded in the cosmos, a cosmos created and ruled by God. Throughout his exegesis Barth insists that the text refers to creation as a good and stable work of God, the goal of which is to create a habitable and stable world that all creatures, including humanity, find a suitable place to dwell.³⁴ Within creation, non-human creatures have

32 Barth's doctrine of creation may be summarized in his formulae that creation is the external basis of the covenant, while covenant is the internal basis of creation (*CD III/1*, 94ff). What he means by this is that while the covenant between God and humanity is enacted first in the particular history of Israel and then in Jesus Christ and the church, it is also the true meaning of all creation. So he writes, "the covenant is the goal of creation and creation the way of the covenant" (*CD II/1*, 97). This formula is reflected in his interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis. In the first creation saga (Gen 1:1-2:4a) he interprets creation as the external basis of the covenant, while creation in the second saga (Gen 2:4b-25) suggests covenant as the internal basis of creation.

33 Theologians have been reluctant to turn to Barth in search of an ecological doctrine of nature. Frequently, it is argued that his doctrine of creation is "instrumentalist." The world and the cosmos are created only to enact the drama of the covenant. In this interpretation the created world does not have sufficient value in and of itself; it is merely the backdrop or theatre for the covenant. Another critique is that Barth is anthropocentric, that his doctrine of creation is overwhelmingly focused on the human creature and its relation to God (see, for example, H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 146 ff.) There is some truth to these charges. Nevertheless, a closer look at what Barth actually says reveals that he cannot be too easily dismissed. Nature does indeed have a significant and irrevocable place in Barth's theology, even if he uses instrumentalist language. And, as Philip Jenkins points out, Barth's anthropocentrism is a negative and limiting view, which is exactly what is needed for our context (Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 182-83).

34 An important theme in Barth's interpretation is that God created an orderly and good world that excludes chaos. For example, Genesis 1:2 – "the earth was formless and void" – does not refer for Barth to a primal chaos with which God must compete. Rather chaos is excluded in God's eternal decision before he creates out of nothing. God created the cosmos "in harmony and at peace within Himself, and therefore, according to His plan, as the theatre and instrument of His acts, an object of His joy and for participation in this joy" (*CD III/1*, 102). Similarly, the creation of light on day one (117ff), the separating of the waters below and above on day two

their own autonomy and integrity apart from humans.³⁵

For our concerns, the most significant point in Barth's interpretation is the relation of humans to other creatures as given on day six. While human beings are given a certain precedence within creation since they are created in the image of God, they are also dependent on creation and limited in their dominion.³⁶ While the saga views man as distinct from other creatures, Barth also notes that this is "not in isolation but in this environment and company" with other creatures as "inseparable companions."³⁷ Humans have "just as much need of them as of all that went before, whereas they for their part have no need for him whatever."³⁸ What is more, human dominion is described as "sovereignty within limits."³⁹ While all created animals are under human dominion, this is not to be a hostile rule; it is not an absolute lordship or ownership. In fact, the dominion is limited to the animal kingdom. Here Barth explicitly rejects views that take dominion as a commission for cultural history, mining, or agricultural feats such as damming. In fact, the earth "is the dwelling place of man" and not his dominion. And what is revealed in the history of the covenant is that humanity "was created, not to be the lord of creation, but to be a lord *in* creation and in token of this to be lord over the beasts."⁴⁰

This "sovereignty within limits" is illustrated in that humans are pictured as vegetarians. For Barth this suggests that all of life precedes from God and depicts life without death.⁴¹ The point is that "Creation means peace—peace between the Creator and creatures, and peace among creatures themselves. The fact that ... man is nourished

(133ff), and creation of dry land (141ff) point to God's goodness in creating a stable and habitable world, and not a chaotic one.

35 For example, Barth highlights the "fecundity, multiplication, and expansion ... of aquatic and aerial" creatures as they are commanded to be fruitful and multiply (169).

36 Creation in the divine image makes possible the encounter with God in the covenant and will reveal the true mystery of creation (*CD III/1*, 183-87).

37 *CD III/1*, 177.

38 *CD III/1*, 177.

39 *CD III/1*, 205.

40 *CD III/1*, 206, italics added.

41 *CD III/1*, 208.

by the seeds of vegetation and fruits, and that animals are nourished by grass and plants, does not disturb the peace.”⁴² The point is “sustenance” not “destruction,” as human dominion strives for the peace of creation.⁴³

Service in the Garden (Genesis 2)

The story of creation is retold in Genesis 2 with a focus on the relation of God and humanity. The two sections that concern us are the creation of the human from the ground (Gen 2:4b-7) and his place in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8-17). Barth’s interpretation suggests the earthling is a gardener who is to serve the earth, both before and in the Garden of Eden.

The first section, the creation of the human from the ground, for Barth is actually an earth-centered story: “it is the earth itself which is important to him. Even man—this saga is not as anthropocentric as it is often made out to be—is first introduced only as the being who had to be created for the sake of the earth and to serve it.”⁴⁴ The human is created to cultivate the land and to serve the earth: “to make that which has been planted thrive, God needs the farmer or gardener. This is the role of man. He thus appears as the being which must be able and ready to serve in order to give meaning and purpose to the planting of the earth.”⁴⁵ To highlight the creature’s role he is created from the dust of the ground, like other animals, and given human form (*adam* is taken from *adamah*, cultivated land).⁴⁶

42 CD III/1, 208-09.

43 CD III/1, 209. Moreover, the climax of the first creation story is not the creation of humans, but the Sabbath of God’s rest. Although day six is the end of God’s creating it is not the completion of his work (177). The “goal of creation, and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God’s Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest, and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate” (98). It is on the seventh day that the covenant secretly commences as it is implicitly an invitation for humanity to enter into covenantal relation with God (214ff).

44 CD III/1, 235.

45 CD III/1, 235, see 237 and 242 as well.

46 CD III/1, 244. This tilling of the land, moreover, is a sign of the hope for creation. The earthling is to till and keep the earth “in order that it may have meaning when

The second section focuses on the planting of the Garden of Eden and the earthling's placement therein. Eden is a kind of "pleasure garden," and "man's life and function is that of a fruit gardener."⁴⁷ But it is a place in which humans and the earth are mutually beneficial to one another. As Barth summarizes, "by reason of its fruitfulness and choice fruits it epitomizes a good land desired by the husbandman or gardener, a place on earth where it is clear that the earth which man is ordained to serve is also ordained to serve him."⁴⁸ Barth also sees the garden as a sign of the fertility and fecundity of creation. The river that flows from the garden is the fertile source that feeds the earth and the tree of life is a sign of the life that God gave humans.⁴⁹

In responding to the charge of anthropocentrism, Barth's interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 is a significant compliment to Bonhoeffer, since Barth moves beyond human embodiment to embeddedness. The human relation to the rest of nature is characterized as dependent and mutually beneficiary, their role in creation is limited, they are to serve the earth and strive for the peace of creation. They are to responsibly fit within the community of creation, as there is creaturely reciprocity.⁵⁰ Not unlike human to human relations, then, this relation between humans and nature is not merely an "over-against" nature, but also a being "with" and "in-dependence-upon" nature, and even a serving of nature.

God will bring it to perfection" (237), a perfection that will occur in Jesus Christ (239).

47 *CD III/1*, 250 and 254.

48 *CD III/1*, 251.

49 *CD III/1*, 255-57.

50 Nevertheless, not unlike Bonhoeffer, Barth suggests that the creation of nature and humanity ultimately find their fulfillment in the covenant, specifically in Jesus Christ. Barth extends this symbol of hope with a typological reading through various passages of scripture that lead to Jesus Christ: "the fact that Jesus Christ will create living water, giving the thirsty drink and making them springs of water. Thus the second saga embraces and includes the presentation of the first. Its horizon is admittedly much narrower than that of the first, but in this respect it is wider. Being cosmologically particular, it can be eschatologically universal" (*CD III/1*, 281).

IV. Nature as “You” and “Other”: Extending the *analogia relationis*

But how might we take the insights of Barth and develop Bonhoeffer? In what follows, I will extend Bonhoeffer’s conception of the *imago Dei* and dominion as “free from” to a “freedom within” nature by viewing non-human nature as an “other” which humans may relate to in a dialogical “I-You” relationship. This will extend the *analogia relationis* and move from embodiment to embeddedness.

To use Bonhoeffer’s categories, viewing nature as an “other” means that it serves as a boundary or limit (*Grenz*) to humans and thus places ethical demands on us. For humans, God is the ultimate other, who created and sustains us, and to whom we turn in gratitude, praise, and obedience. Similarly, as we encounter fellow humans as “others” they serve as a limit or boundary to us, and we have an ethical responsibility to respond in love and service. And so, as humans encounter nature as an “other” it serves as a boundary for human existence and demands love, service, and an ethical response.

But is it permissible to extend the dialogical language of an “I-You” encounter to nature? At first glance this might not seem appropriate. Clearly, we know that a human to human relation is an encounter between individuals with a will, desires, and goals, and this seems fundamentally different from the human relation to nature. We have a pretty good idea what a human to human encounter means, though the same might not be said for nature. However, if we examine the divine-human encounter it is not the same as a human to human encounter. While Christian theology claims that God is personal, has a will, and interacts or is revealed to humanity, this understanding includes the distinction of God from the natural order. God is transcendent from all that has been created, but biblical and theological traditions still insist God is personal or a person. And so in the analogy of relation, wherein the human to human relation reflects the original relation of God to us, the I-You encounter between God and humans is possible despite the ontological difference between God and humans.

In light of this difference, I think it is permissible to think of the human encounter with the natural other as an “I-You” dialogical encounter. We can collectively think of nature in personal terms. For example, Bonhoeffer, not unlike indigenous religions and various new

religious movements, repeatedly refers to nature as “Mother”; nature gives birth to and sustains creatures with great fecundity.⁵¹ Obviously, he does not think that within nature there is one ‘I’ that humanity can address, but the metaphor does acknowledge that nature has its own integrity, life, and diversity that humans depend on. And this becomes more obvious with evolutionary history and ecology. It seems appropriate, therefore, to assign a certain metaphorical subjectivity to nature that makes this I-You encounter between humans and nature more plausible.

The difference with this I-You relation and the previous two is that it is a metaphorical description. Of course, falling under the category of metaphor does not mean that it is less real, important, or appropriate, but that in speaking of the rest of nature in such collective and personal terms we are bringing together a number of observations of nature as being vitally and intimately necessary for human existence.

Another way to extend the *analogia relationis* has been proposed by Paul Santmire. In critical dialogue with Martin Buber, particularly his description of the human to nature relation as I-It, Santmire briefly develops a phenomenology of an ‘I-Ens’ relation.⁵² This is an attempt to capture the relation between human subjectivity and nature under the category of Ens (Latin for ‘being’). Ens may be understood in a wide sense, applying to both fabricated nature and the rest of nature, whether cultivated or wild. Such an approach is intended to overcome the modern instrumentalist view of nature and the idea of the subject standing over-against an object.⁵³

Santmire argues that to approach nature as Ens or being, is to accept its givenness, its mysterious spontaneity, and beauty. As nature is experienced in this way, the human subject responds in wonder, humility, and gratitude. Wonder, moreover, may be experienced as either repulsion or delight. If delight, nature may appear as a symphony or theatre. More importantly, but perhaps problematic from the perspective of someone like Barth, is that nature presents to the

51 See, for example, *Creation and Fall*, 76-77.

52 For what follows, see H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 68-73.

53 Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, 69.

subject a sense of “the divine presence.”⁵⁴ Santmire notes that this sacramental approach to nature is also articulated by Protestants such as Calvin. He quotes from Calvin’s commentary on *Genesis*:

We see, indeed, the world with our eyes, we tread the earth with our feet, we touch innumerable kinds of God’s works with our hands, we inhale a sweet and pleasant fragrance from herbs and flowers, we enjoy boundless benefits, but in those very things of which we attain some knowledge, there dwells such an immensity of divine power, goodness, and wisdom, as absorbs all our senses.⁵⁵

Undergirding this I-Ens phenomenology, then, is a theology of God as creator and preserver of humanity and nature—surely these are the presuppositions of Calvin. Yet what is missing at this point is the ethical demand that an I-You or I-Ens encounter makes of us. This is an insight that Bonhoeffer’s interpretation insists upon. The encounter with any other, which ultimately is an encounter within the community of creation, makes ethical demands upon us. And so any discussion of nature as You or Mother in dialogical or phenomenological description must include a call for conservation and sustainability that nature currently demands from humans.

V. Conclusion

Modern environment ethics, largely influenced by the ubiquitously anthologized article by Lynn White Jr., often views Christianity as irrelevant at best or a key cause underlying the ecological crisis at worst. Pointing to the creation narratives of *Genesis*, especially the image of God and dominion, is a key part of that criticism. Articulating a political theology of nature, then, becomes an urgent task for the Christian church. Constructing theological anthropology in an ecologically responsible way, moreover, means faithfully reformulating or rethinking many of our received doctrines. Instead of eschewing doctrines such as the *imago Dei* or the concept of dominion alto-

⁵⁴ Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, 72.

⁵⁵ Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, 72.

gether, in this paper I have followed Bonhoeffer in reformulating the doctrine of the image of God in terms of an analogy of relations. This avoids the reductionist or dualistic temptations that would define the essence of humans apart from their bodies. Yet if the biblical material suggests that humans are also embedded within a cosmos and earth created by God, as Barth's exegesis bears out, then the analogy of relations must mean more than humans being "free from" nature. The relation to nature as "other" must include human beings being "free for" the rest of nature that includes being over-against, with, and dependent on nature. This I-You encounter, moreover, can be extended to include the rest of nature, demanding an ethical response from humans. Such a view of humanity as embodied and embedded creatures is a fruitful way to think of ourselves as citizens within the community of creation.

The Hermeneutical Grounds for Ethical and Political Action: Imagination and Transcendence in Global Reconciliation

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The acceptance of scientific ideals is paralleled by the rejection of imagination and transcendence. This represents a loss of consciousness, as an awareness of oneself and the world, which forms the grounds for positive ethical and political action. This awareness is rooted in religious feeling and conviction, itself born of the experience of transcendence. The cultural rejection of imagination and transcendence has marginalized religion and the arts. It has also stunted the progress of the natural sciences, fragmented human modes of understanding, and compromised human solidarity on a global scale. The recovery of transcendence (and to a lesser degree, imagination) marks the beginning of world reconciliation, for it is the precondition of conversation by which humanity may create sustainable friendships and solidarity. An experience of transcendence is the catalyst needed to free us of the isolating dogmatisms of religion, politics, and science. The future of global security and peace is one grounded in a particular kind of conversation guided by a hermeneutics of transcendence.

This paper has three parts. The first part examines the role of imagination in the history of science. This is an important first step toward an appreciation of the radical cultural change brought about by the natural sciences. As the most widely shared and enforced standard for truth, scientific objectivity has an interesting and historically troubled relationship with imagination. The growing antagonism between imagination and objectivity is a driving force behind the extinguishing of imagination and, ultimately, transcendence.

The second part of this paper explores the role of transcendence in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. This is controversial in so much as Gadamer, an agnostic, arrives at the conclusion that transcendence—as an experience of religious feeling and conviction—is the ground for all ethical and political action, including inter-religious, non-religious, and world dialogue. His views on transcendence are difficult to identify and explain. There is no sustained work by Gadamer on transcendence, only piecemeal and mostly interview fragments. And yet, strangely, of what there is, he speaks of it as critically important to hermeneutics and the world.

Finally, the third part of this paper suggests how a hermeneutics of transcendence might be the ground for ethical and political action. Transcendence has no content that we may speak or write about, for it is an ineffable experience by its very nature. Even so, the third part will suggest how it might form the ground for our reconciliatory actions.

This paper is motivated by my recent reading of two very different articles that address revolutions in our ideals of human understanding and how those radical changes have influenced culture. As we shall see, humanity is faced with a world-changing shift in consciousness that has submitted to a new paradigm in which the arts, religion, and even relatively recent forms of science are no longer allowed to speak meaningfully. As a consequence, our new world is increasingly imagine-less and dimension-less. To borrow from Marcuse, it is “one-dimensional.”

The first article comes from the internationally respected historian of science, Lorraine Daston. Her work on the history of scientific objectivity is widely read and respected.¹ Daston's work is particularly interesting because it destabilizes many assumptions and prejudices about science. It is impossible to read any of her work on the historical nature of science and then to match that image with the popular culture version in which science possesses the proverbial keys to reality “in itself” (that popular if also sickeningly elusive philosophical

1 For a relatively recent example see, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books, 2007).

notion). Her “Fear & Loathing of the Imagination in Science” sets the tone for a larger conversation with a hermeneutics of transcendence.²

The second article is an interview Gadamer gave shortly before his death in 2002 at the age of 102. I have long been an avid reader of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, but in this unique interview I met a new Gadamer that has been difficult to reconcile with my interpretation of the older one.³ I first read about his philosophical hermeneutics in Grant Osborne’s *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. In it there is a section on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics that seemed oddly out of place amongst other hermeneutical theorists.⁴ Gadamer’s oddity was later confirmed when it became obvious that he represented an entirely new era in hermeneutics, one marked by a move away from hermeneutics as a methodology for interpreting sacred literature, and toward a phenomenological description of human experience—an understanding of understanding, a description of thinking. His new hermeneutics begins with the concrete-practical reality we experience every day, i.e., how we get on with knowing and living in the world. At the time I found him to be very confusing. There was too much difficult jargon and a history of philosophy about which I was completely ignorant. And yet Gadamer’s desire to describe (rather than prescribe) how we know the world in the most natural (most human) fashion seemed authentic and engaging. Gadamer’s project was not a new school with methods to follow or rules to enforce, although these are implied after one has an account of understanding (e.g., how to continue a conversation). Philosophical hermeneutics is a science in the genuine sense of wanting to know, to disclose something hidden from plain view. It is an interdisciplinary science of understanding.

The more I read of Gadamer the less I was able to tell if he might be religious or not; his writings seemed intentionally vague about

2 Lorraine Daston, “Fear & Loathing of the Imagination in Science,” *Daedalus* 134 (2005): 16-30.

3 Jens Zimmermann, “Ignoramus: Gadamer’s ‘Religious Turn,’” *Symposium* 6 (2002): 203-17.

4 Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991).

such matters.⁵ Despite the lack of a clear distinction, I was intrigued by his approach that brazenly challenged the natural sciences as the rightful heralds of truth and understanding. Initially it made sense to assume that Gadamer was not religious, as this seemed to give greater credibility to his stance against the natural sciences. Many years later I learned of Gadamer's agnosticism from Jean Grondin's massive *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* and I accepted it as bittersweet.⁶ It was easier to "place him" and to "read him" so to say, as entirely secular. More recently the agnostic (and more mature) Gadamer proved difficult to label once more. It is this later Gadamer, the one very few of us will have found in his writings, that I wish to consider here. This is a Gadamer who places religious experience, specifically the experience of transcendence, at the heart of his entire project. Gadamer explains to Zimmerman how "his entire work can be seen as a sustained phenomenological description of transcendence."⁷ The task before us is to make sense of a non-confessional Gadamer who accepts a particular religious experience as the ground for understanding, as well as all ethical and political action.⁸

Part I: The Death of Imagination

The widespread scientification of language and thought of our very being—through the ongoing construction of a techno-scientific culture—has marginalized world religions. Perhaps less obvious is that this scientification has marginalized (and delegitimized) many

5 Gadamer admits he is intentionally vague on his religious standing. See the interview: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Without poets there is no philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 69 (1995): 35.

6 Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

7 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 209-210.

8 I am, once again, forced to accept a new Gadamer, one I was unfamiliar with and yet one I already knew. Accustomed readers of hermeneutics will recognize two hermeneutical principles at play here. The first principle is that the other (person, work of art, etc.) is always self-surpassing, always more than is said. When we believe ourselves to be in possession of a complete understanding of someone or something, we may be confident that we are partially blind to them or it. The second principle is that understanding always proceeds based on previous understanding, for there is no starting point, only the ongoing appropriation and interpretation of the new based on our experiences of the past.

other forms of thought that rely on imagination. The argument I wish to explore in this section is that imagination, while important to all good science, has become an enemy within science. That imagination is perceived as essentially unhealthy is odd, but hardly unpredictable in the context of the worldview of scientism. The split between imagination and science is merely one symptom of a disease in which humanity ceases to experience and to understand in the fullest sense possible. If we are willing to allow the jettisoning of imagination and transcendence as features of our experience of reality, the illness is not a scientific one but a world-failing.

It is common sense to many of us outside of the laboratory that good science requires imagination. This is true, we assume, because the truth of nature is not self-evident but requires interrogation and the creative insight of scientists to see beyond the proverbial curtain. If the facts of nature were self-evident we would have little need for science. Machines and microscopes only tell us so much. The imaginative mind sees more when it looks beyond, hoping that evidence will follow to support the vision. On a methodological level imagination is essential to theory development; simply put, a theory is an imagined reality, i.e., what might be the case.⁹ For example, James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the nature of DNA by first imagining what it might be like and how it might work. They had only a single X-ray diffraction image taken by Rosalind Franklin that was one-dimensional and blurry. It took highly creative minds to interpret the structure of DNA based on the image. In most scienc-

9 Theoretical knowing has a dynamic history of meaning. For instance, when Aristotle introduces *theōria* in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, theoretical knowing is knowledge of the universal, necessary, eternal, and true, i.e., the ideal science mathemata. When one contemplates, thinking theoretically, one is participating in the divine—thinking the eternal and immutable. The connection between thinking theoretically and theoretically is clear in Aristotle, for only the Gods may think in such a manner without ceasing. By contrast, popular usage of “theoretical knowing” by scientists comes in degrees of certainty about what is true. For example, String Theory and Evolutionary Theory are both theories in the broad sense but the latter is often asserted with a much higher degree of certainty than the former. The ambition to claim knowledge of universal, necessary, and eternal truth has been replaced in most scientific circles with the acceptance of probability and likelihood. In other words, theory in modern science is seen as more limited, provisional, socially-historically influenced, and changing. Thomas Kuhn has made the connections between theory (paradigms of imagined reality) and degrees of certainty famous.

es, theories are then modelled. Watson and Crick built a six-foot, three-dimensional model of DNA that was eventually accepted by the scientific community. Such models, which come in a number of forms, are then used to make predictions, e.g., if X is true Y should follow. The role of experimentation is to gather data regarding whether or not the predictions are satisfied. This is a simple caricature of science but accurate enough for our purposes. Good science begins with imagination. Without it science cannot exist except in a superficial sense. Daston's "Fear and Loathing" asks "... how and why large portions of the educated public—and many working scientists—came to think otherwise, systematically opposing imagination to science."¹⁰

Something happened, Daston argues, starting about the mid-nineteenth century in which the rise of objectivity and a certain view of facts as fixed and unchanging gave rise to an opposition to imagination. "Facts," since the seventeenth-century, have been defined in terms of a kind of detachment. It is the nature of a genuine fact to be free of the subjectivities of human experience—our biases, prejudices, cloudy perceptions, and mistakes of judgment. Daston argues that as science evolved, so too did its stringent defence of anything that might erode or corrupt facts. The imaginative faculty that had been used to see beyond mere facts, to see new possibilities and realities, became both feared and loathed as an enemy of science. Pushed to the margins, imagination is no longer seen as a catalyst of progress but as its inhibitor. When we unpack the history a little more in a moment, what we will find is that as science grows more insecure, realizing that facts are harder and harder to pin down, especially in the face of scientific revolutions, a new radicalism becomes necessary—one in which the fact must be saved at all costs.

Daston makes note of the use of fiscal analogies for over a century in which scientists look like accountants. She writes, "To permit the imagination to infiltrate science is to tamper with the books, to betray a public trust."¹¹ There are two particularly interesting ideas here. The first point is that science is a public entity, something that serves humanity by maintaining a superior approach to reality. One

10 Daston, "Fear & Loathing," 17.

11 Daston, "Fear & Loathing," 16.

of the great changes during the scientific revolution was to make experiments publically accessible and/or observable. Having the ability to demonstrate the truth of something for all to see was not only useful for gaining credibility, it also reflected the public purpose of science. The truth of science is a public truth, something in which everyone may participate, if only as observers. Today, while much of society may be challenged in its scientific literacy, the role of science remains that of a public good, a public trust.

The second point is that imagination represents a “tampering” with truth. This is a metaphor of course, but an interesting and ethical one that reveals the broader social implications of facts. The concept of “fact” is that there is a world out there, i.e., a book of nature, and if we are able to observe and/or quantify it correctly we will have succeeded in gaining fact. However, any input on the part of the human mind (or its culture), any imaginative ingredient, even language itself, risks corrupting the truth. Such allowance for subjectivity is not merely a methodological failure to see the world as it is, in itself, but a moral failing, a crime. Only criminals tamper with the books.

Daston argues that the current view of science and imagination was born of the perceived “fragility of facts in the face of overweening imagination.”¹² This is a discernible problem in religion and theology as well. It is all too easy to fall into a world of fantasy, one that is more acceptable than the real world. The scientific self and the imaginative self have been wrestling from the start. This was not initially a war, however, for that was to come later on. As Daston observes:

What is striking about eighteenth-century views of the imagination in light of later developments is their firm insistence that the imagination, despite its perils, was as essential to philosophy and science—the pursuits of reason—as to the arts. Moreover, both art and science drew on the same kind of healthy imagination—and both were at risk from the same pathologies of the imagination.¹³

12 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 19.

13 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 20.

The imagination, subject to reason and its rules, was a natural force within understanding. It was not to be feared or loathed. To save us from madness, however, it should be tamed in some fashion. This is sound advice for any great dreamer. Referring to the difficulty of preserving facts and the perceived need for a special discipline Daston writes, “The chronic inability to hold fast to fact, to keep the inventive imagination in check, was a midpoint along a continuum to madness. Scientists were as much at risk as poets from the diseases of the imagination.”¹⁴

The history of imagination in science changed radically between 1780 and 1820 when, according to Daston, “facts hardened, the imagination ran riot, and art and science diverged in their aims and their collective personae.”¹⁵ The new age of fact as a universal, certain, and necessary thing, free of human subjectivity, including judgment, took hold. A wedge had been driven between the arts and sciences. A consequence of this was that science became viewed as that which is most communicable while the arts found themselves relegated to the solitary corners of subjective whim. Truth, reality itself, was evermore to be accessible through the methods and tools of objectivity. Daston:

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century this ideal of objectivity as communicability, short of every idiosyncrasy and particular perspective, was realized in the emergence of international, long-term scientific collaborations like the *Internationale Gradmessung* or the *Carte du Ciel*, which committed participants around the globe and across generations to instruments, procedures, and research agendas standardized in the name of commensurability and solidarity.¹⁶

The new truth, largely free of imagination (and human subjectivity), has its roots in universal communication. Fact is shared through the medium of language, made neutral through standardization (the

14 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 19.

15 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 22.

16 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 23. This is an instructive passage for our later discussion of Gadamer.

generation of sameness in symbols and concepts, and the exclusion of subjectivity). At this point there is a temptation to argue for the peaceful coexistence of communicative objectivity and imagination, perhaps having them live as strangers rather than enemies. According to Daston, a peaceful and neutral ground was not to be. “Communitarian objectivity could not coexist with the artistic cultivation of individualism, which enshrined personal perspectives and identified the ineffable with originality.”¹⁷

Daston and Peter Galison argue for what they see as the emergence, in the mid-nineteenth century, of a second objectivity, the mechanical¹⁸ Mechanical objectivity “replaces judgment with data-reduction techniques, observers with self-registering instruments, hand-drawn illustrations with photographs.”¹⁹ Like before, imagination was a threat, for it threatened to replace the facts of the mechanical with its own fantastical creations. And yet, according to Daston, imagination managed to remain present in science albeit in a strange, perhaps schizophrenic fashion. Permit me to quote her at length one last time:

At the crossroads of the choice between subjective and objective modes stood the imagination. Very few nineteenth-century writers went so far as to deny scientists any imagination. Baudelaire, for example, acknowledged that imagination was as essential to the great scientists—or for that matter, the great diplomat or soldier—as to the artist. But in the next breath he relegated photography, whose exact rendering of what is seen he took to be diametrically opposed to the artistic imagination, to the sphere of science, where it served without corrupting.²⁰

Let us grant Daston’s description of a more nuanced if also conflicted relationship between imagination and science. While imagination

17 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 28.

18 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations* 40 (Fall 1992): 81-128.

19 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 28.

20 Daston, “Fear & Loathing,” 28.

may have been permitted in some limited fashion it was not really science. By comparison to the photograph, the artistic imagination was a poor imitation, both nonfactual and corruptible.

Any guarded optimism or tolerance for imagination soon changed. Daston argues that distrust of imagination was born of a fear that would eventually be combined with loathing.

Pure facts, severed from theory and sheltered from the imagination, were the last, best hope for permanence in scientific achievement. ... The wild imagination potentially contaminated the purity of facts, and this is why it came not only to be feared but also loathed.²¹

The authority of science is not derived from its methods, which count innumerable, but its ability to reveal facts, i.e., its ahistorical and trans-cultural product. To achieve this, however, requires nothing less than the eradication of the human presence. In its objectivity, science becomes something above the human. Facts transcend experience. That is the promise and guarantee given for its superiority over other forms of understanding. The hermeneutical argument we shall consider next is that this bias of scientism (against bias) is wrong. Superior understanding is born of imagination and imagination is born of human experience.

Daston's article is largely suggestive. We are forced to think in generalities and to imagine potential implications for culture and religion today. Even so, we are left with certain impressions regarding objectivity. Its nature is fluid—changing to meet new views of truth. Its means of producing facts is evolving. And it excludes all forms of knowing that do not encourage its own. Let us tentatively accept Daston's history of imagination. What are the implications for culture when its leading voice of reason and truth denies imagination? In its fear and loathing, objectivity has made its enemy imagination. While not the topic of this paper, it is important to note the same enemy in fundamentalist religions worldwide. By "fundamentalist" I mean the inability and/or unwillingness to entertain doubt and vulnerability.

21 Daston, "Fear & Loathing," 30.

The one who acts as a fundamentalist is likely to believe himself to possess absolute truth. He is unassailable, immovable, and unquestionable. The truth he has is full and perfect—it is fact. The problem is not merely that he possesses a fact that is a fiction for everyone else—he may indeed be right. Rather, it is the belief that the fact exists as static and unquestionable. He believes himself right because he lacks the imagination to see otherwise (to experience alternatives) and to recognize the limits of knowledge. Much evil is born of a lack of imagination and the ability to see beyond oneself.

Part II: Philosophical Hermeneutics and Gadamer’s Religious Turn

Gadamer’s magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1960), conceives of hermeneutical understanding in terms of our linguistic, historical, and dialogical nature.²² Each of us exists as a being in conversation, he argues. Even when we are alone our understanding of the world is one in which we seek answers as responses to questions. The basic assumption is that we are creatures that live as “understanding” beings. The structure or character of this understanding is conversational, a give and take, back and forth, question and answer. In other words, we exist within worlds of meaning and interpretation. We are not merely physical entities characterized by our perceptions of other physical entities. We are creatures born into countless conversations (e.g., cultural, political, religious, ethical, scientific), often unaware of their conditioning our thoughts and actions. Hermeneutics helps draw attention to the traditions and dogmas we must critique but it by no means makes them transparent. To appreciate the human, then, is to appreciate its unique mode of understanding that is guided by its ability to see what is questionable. Success cannot be determined by one’s possession of facts but by navigating one’s world full of innumerable conversations. What unites us is first and foremost our willingness to question—more importantly, to see the world’s questionability—not our agreement on answers.

In his hermeneutical defence of the humanities against what he sees as the dangerously naive self-understanding of the natural sciences vis-à-vis method and objectivity (in which there should be

22 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006).

no conversations or dialogues, for the self must be silent and, paradoxically, absent), Gadamer explores our experience of art (all art, e.g., music, theater, painting, sculpture), historically conditioned understanding, and linguisticity. With these he builds the case for human understanding far beyond the confines of method. We must go beyond scientific method if we wish to survive as a species. So far, in fact, that we must experience transcendence, for it reawakens the most pressing questions we may have forgotten, or that may have been subdued by the lack of imagination. The scope of the natural sciences ignores our most challenging and uniquely human questions such as the nature of good and evil, and the meaning of existence and death.²³ Religion (as a public trust in which a “messing with the books” is also a crime) has long presented these questions as pressing and essential to culture building.

Gadamer, responding to religion, says “I simply cannot protect myself from these questions.”²⁴ Rather than longing for the divine, Gadamer finds himself drawn to theology and transcendence reluctantly. Religious questions cannot be avoided for they are a necessary part of trying to make sense of the world. There is a certain irony here; the man who, following Heidegger, made so much of our finitude (our concrete-practical existence) in his description of hermeneutical understanding finds himself confronted by the need to speak about transcendence.

To be religious in Gadamer’s sense means to experience a certain feeling of transcendence that is characterized primarily by our recognition of the limits of knowledge. The great world religions, like great philosophy perhaps, share in the human experience of radical ignorance. This is a very natural and universal experience according to Gadamer. In retrospect, this type of transcendence is discernible in his first book, *Truth and Method*, when he examines the experience of art. In our experience of art we encounter something that cannot be quantified or measured and yet it reveals a meaningful world that cannot be communicated in any other way than through the experi-

23 This is not a direct criticism of the natural sciences. The scope of scientific investigation is the natural world. The criticism emerges when science becomes the sole means of asking and answering questions (i.e., scientism).

24 Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 207.

ence itself. However, that he recognizes transcendence as a religious feeling is not easily identified in *Truth and Method*, or any of his major texts.

While a discussion of religious experience may not factor into his works, or only indirectly through his discussion of art, there is a significant amount of theology, especially Protestant theology. More than a few readers of *Truth and Method* have been surprised by his discussion of language when he turns away from the Ancient Greeks (Gadamer is first and foremost a classical philologist, especially of Plato and Aristotle), and toward early Christianity for inspiration.²⁵ Given that his discussion of language is central to his overall project (as illustrated by his now famous phrase, “Being that can be understood is language”), this is an unexpected move on Gadamer’s part. In Christianity (especially St. Augustine and St. Aquinas), Gadamer finds the conceptual and analogical means of explaining the relationship between language and thought.²⁶ The result is an unconventional way of thinking about language and thought with radical consequences. For instance, if language and thought are inseparable, as he argues, then a healthy language cannot be turned into a tool for the delivery of thought as if it were a neutral medium. While the view of language as existing only secondarily to thought (thinking and reason come first, free of language) may be credited largely to Plato, it is embodied most robustly today in the natural sciences and its standardization of communication. Gadamer believes our very sense of self and the world is linguistic in nature. To narrow language to a set of fabricated signs and symbols, for instance, would be to narrow the world itself (at least as we see it), for it abstracts language from its living conversations (tradition, history, culture, etc.). It is

25 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 418-28.

26 Gadamer writes, “Language, by the way, is not only the language of words. There is language of the eyes, the language of hands, pointing and naming, all this is language and confirms that language is constantly present in our transactions with-one-another [*im Miteinander*]. Words are always answers, even when they are questions.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache,” as cited and translated in Richard E. Palmer “Gadamer’s recent work on language and philosophy: On “Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 384. Palmer’s paper is both a summarizing and interpreting essay on Gadamer’s work.

the incarnation (and St. Augustine's discussion of the Trinity) that allows for Gadamer's correction of this continued misunderstanding. If his hermeneutical approach did not already seem strange, then his appeal to the incarnation in order to correct the instrumentalization (and scientification) of thought and language must make him seem so now. In short, Gadamer (again as the agnostic) has a track record of relying on religion to begin to heal what he sees as dangerous forms of thinking and acting.

And yet for all of the interconnections between theology and philosophical hermeneutics, one would be challenged to find any biblical studies, readings, or interpretations on Gadamer's part.²⁷ Raised by his father, an accomplished scientist, Gadamer never had a personal experience of faith. On Zimmermann's account, Gadamer's father rejected religion as something people used to escape reality.²⁸ Gadamer, by contrast, views it as something that connects us to reality in the broadest sense. According to Grondin, Gadamer "had a sense of the importance and ineffable greatness of religious faith, but this sense he gained through the evocative experience of poetry and the work of art."²⁹

For Gadamer, transcendence marks the limits of human knowledge and the boundary of the mysterious.³⁰ It is not merely an experience in which we hope to find a solution to a problem. Transcendence reveals an inescapable futility in our knowledge. There is a classic, although simplistic, distinction between a problem and a mystery. A problem is at least possible to solve, while a mystery admits no such potential. When there is still hope of understanding, we are presented with possibility of resolution (some sense of comprehension). When hope of mental domination (cognition, awareness, compartmentalization) is exhausted we encounter a mystery that must remain an open question. Much of life must remain an open question, and

27 On this point see Jean Grondin, "Gadamer and Bultmann," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, eds. J. Pokorny and J. Roskovec (Tübingen: Mohr Sibeck, 2002).

28 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 207.

29 Jean Grondin, "Gadamer and Bultmann," 5.

30 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 207.

religious transcendence is our constant reminder of this inexhaustible questionability.

My above description by itself would probably sound too epistemological to Gadamer. An experience of transcendence is more than epistemological speculation, for it is a genuine experience of conviction. One stands resolute—in ignorance—for having experienced it.³¹ Gadamer:

Religion is I think a very natural human requirement. We cannot understand what death is. That's beyond us. And all the religions try to give a vision of transcendence. In the broadest sense it is present in all the different religions. In most religions it is not too difficult to accept such a vision; but in Christianity it is harder. There is the notion of incarnation—the problem that God became man, and that we need to believe in that. And this faith exists in mental tension. I have great respect for people who can cooperate in such a church. But it is a question for mankind. And in art I see things which are very similar to transcendence.³²

Zimmerman explains that Gadamer's preferred description is, "the religious feeling of transcendence."³³ Gadamer uses the term transcendence and "the beyond" interchangeably.³⁴ Transcendence, according to Zimmermann, reveals "a limit that points to something greater and more mysterious than ourselves."³⁵ Transcendence is not a belief in a particular God, for Gadamer, but "something incomprehensible."³⁶ Belief implies a cognitive assent or agreement. How might one

31 Zimmermann recalls Gadamer's emphasis that the experience of transcendence is not merely speculative or theoretical but, when "genuinely experienced" we find that it "must have the power of religious conviction" (Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 209).

32 Interview: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Without poets there is no philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 69 (1995): 35.

33 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 205.

34 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," see endnote 7.

35 Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 208.

36 Hans-George Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo*

cognitively agree with the incomprehensible? Would one believe in transcendence by giving it clothes, character, personality—theology? No, an experience of the incomprehensible is something we all share and therefore something we may appeal to as a basis for conversation without giving it clothes. Science, religion, and theology become dangerous when they lack this experience as the basis for thought and action.

Global Conversation, Science, and the Nature of Transcendence

Conversation and solidarity are well established concerns in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. He is convinced that without genuine dialogue, including interfaith dialogue, there may be no sustainable solutions to present world crises.³⁷ We need hermeneutics as a uniquely suitable form of thinking about dialogue and human solidarity. Gadamer believes that neither theology nor the natural sciences are capable of facilitating such a conversation. The only non-marginalizing, non-partisan, non-epistemically biased approach is that of hermeneutics, for its basis is not confessional but transcendental.

Hermeneutics challenges our assumptions regarding authority by giving everyone permission to talk—at least initially. This is quite unlike what we see playing out in cultures where there is a clear hierarchy of expertise and knowledge, giving credibility to some and not others. This observation is not an implied argument for equal standing or relativity; some reasons are clearly better than others. This is an argument that we ought to critique our presuppositions regarding who should be allowed to speak. Hermeneutics asks us to challenge culture and its authorities. When we do so a different kind of conversation becomes possible. Again, this does not mean suspending judgement or critical reflection, but a putting of oneself at risk so that one might hear something different. When we hear only experts we risk hearing very little.³⁸ Transcendence encourages this position

Dottori, trans. Rod Coltmann and Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2006), 78.

³⁷ Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 207.

³⁸ E.g., experts are typically bound by consensus, trained to think in specific disciplinary ways, responsible to economic and political powers, eager to defend their own expertise. It is helpful to consider the role of paradigms in this context. Thomas

of vulnerability and accessibility. It is an event of understanding in which a “fusion of horizons” takes place, (using a phrase made popular by Gadamer), a fusion in which neither the person (forcing the truth into his or her preconceptions) nor the other (person, world, work of art) takes priority but something new is created. A “fusion” represents the sometimes violent changes required for understanding (e.g., to one’s assumptions and prejudices). The fusion of horizons is an understanding dominated by no one, for it is the truth of the emerging subject matter that we cannot control. This is an understanding of reality mediated through tradition and language, for no one is free of these (they make understanding possible), and yet there is something more than merely relative created in this understanding. To offer another metaphor, it is a way of seeing oneself and the other that was not evident before the darkness was disturbed by the light of dialogue. The “fusion” speaks to the reshaping and reconstituting of elements of understanding. Transcendence speaks to a profound case of this kind of reshaping of understanding for it is a deeply troubling, perhaps one might say, even mystical experience.

The hermeneutical concern is that too many of us shut out conversations, unwilling to listen to contrary and challenging opinions. Perhaps we are so sure of ourselves, so confident in our worldviews, that we are unwilling (rarely unable) to listen to others. Transcendence calls us all back to dialogue. Zimmermann writes, “According to Gadamer, the pressing philosophical task is to prepare a dialogue between the world religions by discovering in each one a moment of ‘the great chain we call transcendence.’”³⁹ This is no less true for our politicians. How different would our world be if our political representatives had the religious conviction of transcendence and its inspired willingness to listen?

In the case of science and imagination it seems as though any questioning of fact is rejected precisely because the imagination asks

Kuhn’s famous argument (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962) regarding how scientists are blindly obedient to the (social/historical) paradigms of scientific communities has relevance for all domains in which “expertise” are made possible.

39 As cited in Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 207. Original Gadamer quote from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts. Ein philosophischer Dialog mit Riccardo Dottori* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2002): 80.

for a conversation, for a worldview to be open to something else, to the beyond. The fear of imagination is not a superiority but a clear inferiority, an intentional ignorance to anything other than one's own voice. Gadamer:

The method of modern science is characterized from the start by a refusal: namely, to exclude all that which actually eludes its own methodology and procedures. Precisely in this way it would prove to itself that it is without limits and never wanting for self-justification. Thus it gives the appearance of being total in its knowledge and in this way provides a defense behind which social prejudices and interests lie hidden and thus protected. One need only think of the role of experts in contemporary society and of the way economics, politics, war, and the implementation of justice are more strongly influenced by the voice of experts than by the political bodies that represent the will of the society.⁴⁰

While I have chosen to criticize modern science for its neglect of imagination (and ultimately transcendence), one could easily do the same with modern theology. Gadamer notes this neglect in both Hegel and Bultmann, who “can become so caught up in self-reflexivity that they no longer take transcendence seriously.”⁴¹ Gadamer shares with Zimmermann that he admires church-attending Christians, but “also fears the narrow-mindedness and defensive posture effected by institutionalized religion.”⁴² The force of hermeneutics resides in its requirement that we abandon our self-secured dogmatism—the kind that blinds us to our own insecurities and the truth of the other.⁴³

40 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), 93.

41 Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 207.

42 Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 207.

43 In this sense we find a parallel to postmodern critiques in general. However, Gadamer's appeal to transcendence as a religious experience is odd in the context of postmodern critiques.

The great hermeneutical goal is to find an experience of transcendence that “touches us all” according to Gadamer.⁴⁴

Reconciliation

Philosophical hermeneutics seeks a new form of world dialogue in which the basis of reconciliation is a shared religious feeling, typified by the acceptance of ignorance. I am using the term reconciliation in the most obvious sense as the rejoining of two or more people. The basis of rejoining is not agreement of belief and/or perception—no erasure of the self to secure immutable facts—but a shared experience. Moreover, it is not merely fulfilled by agreeing that we have limited knowledge. Rather, reconciliation is achieved when dialogue partners are overtaken by a particular subject matter that does not belong fully to either one. To be reconciled demands neither agreement nor acquiescence. One need not submit to another’s view. Rather, in reconciliation we find an ever expanding and evolving conversation. Quite simply, talking is allowed to happen freely and its content is surprising. Talking may end in disagreement and it may be heated, but at least there are voices heard and sustained in an atmosphere of solidarity. Reconciliation is more than just speaking, for one who speaks, speaks to be heard. There is no genuine speaking without the most difficult task of listening. To be reconciled means working hard to allow the other to speak and to be heard. This is possible when the other becomes an open question—when we see the questionability at play in ourselves and the other. More to the point, it is when one’s prejudices become questionable (i.e., broken open to change). When something becomes questionable it means that one is no longer able to maintain the previous way of understanding. In a very important sense dialogue is sustained by one’s ability to support questionability in understanding.

A hermeneutics of transcendence has a child-like character. I see it in my four-year old son daily. His devotion to understanding has a sometimes fevered pitch. He readily accepts that he does not know, without shame or difficulty. He earnestly desires to come to terms with the world. However, I would not describe his mode of

44 Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 208.

inquisitiveness as possessing a religious conviction. He is simply wildly enthused about the world. Will this change when he becomes an adult? Will he need something like a deep religious conviction to break free of his potential future dogmatism? There will come a day, no doubt, when he will be sure he knows “the other” in such a way that all contrary opinion is but gibberish. When that happens he will need just such a religious awakening as Gadamer describes of transcendence—a violent jolt from the accepted (prejudice) toward a new and open conversation.

Gadamer’s transcendence has the character of something unnerving. He states, “When I think of the cross, it is like chills running down one’s spine.”⁴⁵ Merely in contemplating the reality of the crucifixion we find an experience over which we cannot claim control or understanding. We cannot say we understand or know. To claim that one fully understands is absurd, and yet the point is not that we call someone who makes such a claim wrong (in error), but that we recognize him as someone without religious conviction—without a living sense of transcendence.

An obvious problem emerges after we take transcendence seriously and engage in our conversations with one another. In the case of either religion or science, the affirmation of a particular revelation or observation becomes difficult, if not impossible. Zimmerman makes this criticism of Gadamer and asks how it is that individual religions may positively affirm their own uniqueness, given that Gadamer wants us to emphasize the most common denominator—the feeling of transcendence. If I say that I believe Jesus is the son of God and the saviour of all humanity, am I not immediately shutting down dialogue with my Jewish friend still awaiting the Messiah? It seems that in order to sustain dialogue we must limit our secondary (confessional, theological) convictions radically. What, then, might I have to say to the other? More importantly, what might I be able to hear from the other?

Zimmerman’s criticism seems to miss the power of transcendence. Having committed ourselves to a new ideal, based upon our mutual ignorance and questionability, new worlds are opened up

⁴⁵ Zimmermann, “Ignoramus,” 209.

to us. Talking with my Jewish friend does not require my silence or antagonism. In a practical manner, difference in doctrine should make genuine dialogue a little easier. If I am truly listening to the other I am not merely asserting myself, or trying to win (which may be true), but also becoming vulnerable to change. This risking does not demand a rejection of my own theology. On the contrary, the conversation is made possible precisely because I have a theology that I am able to develop in response to my friend. My belief is not a fact, for its meaning is much greater than I may possess. I do not need to defend it against imagination, the other, or contrary doctrine. I must, if I wish it to be more real (more apparent), allow it to be questioned and to question. I must accept the fear of being vulnerable if I wish to know myself. This is not a reduction to the lowest common denominator but a higher calling, an important challenge addressed to all of us, in which difference ought to be extolled as a virtue. We are not interested in difference for the sake of difference but for the sake of gaining insight and clarity. If I want to know more about what it means for Jesus to be the son of God I must seek out precisely these sorts of conversations that I cannot control and that I cannot predict. An easy alternative is to try to maintain dominion over my facts in the face of all imagination and transcendence. Insulated in this way, my beliefs are secured from all risk and fear of change. If I turned my theology into a mechanical theology, a standardized communicable theology, an unquestionable belief system, would it cease being theology? At the very least it would be a theology without transcendence.

Part III: Imagination, Immanence, and Transcendence

The root meaning of transcendence refers to a climbing or going beyond. Transcendence, as a concept, is often given meaning by its contrast with immanence.⁴⁶ This contrast is typically used as a spatial metaphor to describe God's relationship with the world (universe). To the degree that God is far, we speak in terms of transcendence; near, we speak of immanence. The contrast also speaks to an epistemological conundrum of knowing the unknowable. These are hardly precise

⁴⁶ This is similar to what we find with objectivity and subjectivity, for objectivity is typically defined as "not" subjectivity. This way of thinking is most frustrating because it explains so little.

terms, certainly not something one would find on measuring devices. Their purpose is to help shape our ideas and concepts along a spectrum that sometimes has the two concepts overlapping (e.g., God as in but not of the world).

Transcendence as a surpassing (going beyond) is difficult and potentially self-refuting if we are not careful. Transcendence cannot be a new knowledge or truth in the usual sense, as if one has surpassed previous knowledge with new content.⁴⁷ There is no more cognitive climbing in an experience of transcendence. It is a sudden stop along the path to the top. This impasse is permanent and uncompromising. It is shocking, for one was sure—just a breath before—that the path led on, that it went somewhere. But now it is gone and no more light, sound, nor earth remains. One's senses are suddenly useless and yet, intuitively, there is something more. In transcendence a new form of distinct understanding emerges, one that did not exist before, nor one that really exists in the normal way now. It is not merely ignorance or bafflement but something definite in a way, for there is a particularity about it (one knows it but cannot speak about it, thereby recognizing it as specific and unique). The argument made by Gadamer is that the failure of both reason and imagination in the experience of transcendence changes the whole person, reshaping and redesigning the meaning of meaning and the truth of truth.

I take the meaning of imagination in a generic sense, as the ability to think beyond the given (i.e., the empirical reality as it stretches out before us). Along a spectrum, imagination may be relatively simple, such as the reshaping of given objects in the world, or it may be more aggressive, such as the invention of new, entirely unreal worlds. There is a corresponding degree of practicality among forms of imagination, with the most unhelpful forms being those that prevent our successful living day to day. Madness is often defined along the spectrum of imagination—too much of it without healthy restraint leads to social shunning, medical intervention, even incarceration. We live in a world for which the religious experience of transcendence may one day be defined solely as madness.

⁴⁷ The implied view of scientific progress is obvious enough—more knowledge means more progress.

While imagination and transcendence are related they are distinct. In an experience of transcendence we meet the end of all reason and imagination. Both are silenced, stupefied by the mystical encounter. No doubt imagination plays an integral role in encouraging transcendence, reminding us again and again of the infinite diversity and possibilities in life. However, the creativity of the artist, scientist, or theologian is always finite or bound in some manner. Transcendence is always more defying, illusive, and provocative. Moreover, it is the most widely shared and accessible. I would not claim to share in the imagination of great artists, for I do not possess that faculty. But I may share in some meaningful degree in transcendence by virtue of my humanity.

Part of being a person in the world means projecting one's will upon it. In a meaningful and sustained fashion the universe is subjected to the person. Through religion we shape the world and yet we do not often realize it is largely our creation. This is not always, or even primarily, a conscious activity. It is an efficiency of survival. The grand personification of this action is found in the shape of the divine. Nietzsche, Freud, and Feuerbach are spokespersons for the psychological and anthropological critique of transcendence. We fashion gods in our image as a utility, they argue.⁴⁸ When another culture sees our gods they see us, our desires, beliefs, and personalities. These created gods change with culture, evolving and adapting to our new needs. In this way the transcendent is the loss of contact with reality. Transcendence becomes the most immanent, for we are the creators; we are the gods—although we do not know this perversion as such. One need only to look toward the nearest set of anthropomorphisms to see this survival efficiency at work. Everywhere God is made immanent for our purposes. It is a most pervasive force, disguised as a sincere experience of the transcendent, which it cannot be.

Transcendence and Self-Forgetting

In this context, imagination as a human faculty, when applied to the theological expression of the divine, is potentially unwelcome. Imagination may only hope to fail, to make immanent what is tran-

48 See, for examples, Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), and Nietzsche's *The Antichrist* (1895), among others.

scendent. Like reason, imagination has a boundary. Kierkegaard's paradoxical passion is instructive here. We run up against the transcendent for we are passionate to know the unknown, but this cannot be satisfied with reason or imagination. These are faculties of the mind, of a knowing being that cannot ascend high enough (to use the spatial metaphor again). A more genuine transcendence does not suffer from this solipsism, for its ambition is an overcoming of the self. This is not in the sense of objectivity in which the self is destroyed, but a forgetting of oneself in such a way that the other is finally available as an other.⁴⁹

In Gadamer we find a similar overcoming of oneself in terms of forgetfulness. His treatment of language in the third part of *Truth and Method* offers an interesting example of forgetting. Let us grant for the moment that understanding happens through the medium of language. Gadamer points out that the more focus we put on language, the words, the structure of the paragraph, etc., the less we understand the meaning and message. The sooner we forget the medium the sooner we come to understand the meaning. Likewise, if in my encounter with a dialogue partner I am constantly aware of my need to assert my views or simply to refute the other, regardless of my motivation, the truth of the subject matter is subdued and less likely to arrive (if for no other reason than that my world is not allowed to be challenged). In a very practical way I must forget myself (my ambition, my desire to use/abuse, my needs), and seek out the matter at hand, even in the words of my enemy. I must give up the desire to control and to dominate.⁵⁰ This way of experience asks much of both

49 To help explain this, I am thinking about William James and his observation that in the mystical state of consciousness, overcoming boundaries between individual and Absolute is "the great mystic achievement" (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902).

50 "The great chain that we call transcendence" to use Gadamer's words, points to a loss of control and domination. It feels as if at every turn there are new forms of control, whether socio-political, techno-scientific, or religio-political. As Gadamer sees it, "... transcendence is a very good expression to use for saying that we aren't certain what there is in the beyond or what it is like. None of us can say that we have any mastery over the beyond. We simply can't say anything about a lot of things ..." (*A Century of Philosophy*, 74).

persons. Strictly speaking we may say that there is always a subject and an object (one person and another) but in the moment of genuine dialogue such distinctions become useless and counterproductive. We invite the fullest forms of understanding when we forget that we are subjects and objects.

Transcendence as Common Accord

A hermeneutics of transcendence is an understanding of our not knowing, which forms the basis of growing together and succeeding as a species. In transcendence our limitations are thrown back at us, forcing us to move beyond ourselves, to forget ourselves. As the basis for political and ethical action, transcendence binds us to a common experience. It reminds us of our common frailty and the inaccessibility of absolute self-confidence in the face of God, the universe, and one another. The practical power of transcendence (to risk instrumentalizing) is that we find a new humility toward the other. We are bound by our finitude, our limitations, for we are not gods and our sciences are not omniscient. This is not an argument against having an opinion and taking a stand—we must do so as the precondition for any conversation—but a critique of the manner and spirit by which we do so.

The self-aggrandizing of fundamentalism in all its forms is a toxicity. The tonic to remedy this ailment is a religious experience of transcendence. Then no word becomes final and all conversations have new legitimacy. The strength of certainty in knowing an immutable (unchanging) truth becomes an illness, a weakness. The unwillingness to hear the other, to entertain the very notion that we might be wrong, fails to provide the vulnerability needed to save our world. We need not burn our books or dethrone our gods, but we must find a way of living in which we are most exposed and sensitive to the other.

This way of thinking appears most fantastical given the current geo-political climate of gross horrors and economic exploitation. We are all, so it seems, at war. The law of nature seems to push back against the cultivation of vulnerability and the integrity of transcendence. Indeed, this proposal is uniquely suited to humanity for we are plagued by the wrong kind of insecurity. We have unlimited force at

our disposal, whether it is the cunning to shape the material world in support of life, or to erase all life through nuclear warfare. We are most powerful, and yet, strangely, we find it so difficult to have a meeting of the minds, to speak with the other. Our ideas about reality, ultimate reality, about one another, get in the way of peace. Only transcendence may save us.⁵¹

Transcendence does not highlight a self-loathing in understanding, as if we must turn away from truth or a sense of perspective. On the contrary, we become more certain in a way for having had the experience. We know that others do not know as well. We become convinced of our common situation of struggling to see. What binds us is not agreement on fact or policy, but the conversation itself, the ongoing commitment to engage and be engaged with others.⁵² This is not our ultimate goal, of course, for we strive for resolutions and actionable decisions, but the common thread remains one of dialogue.

Those who refuse such an invitation seem naive, even simple. We may be tempted to dismiss the insanity of terrorists targeting innocents in markets and on buses as unavoidable aberrations, even mocking their broken minds, so twisted and perverted. Are these minds not the symptom of a world-wide disease of self-assured knowing, of blindness to the other? Transcendence is a confrontation with the idolatry of fact and belief as fact. Let me end with Gadamer's hopeful and yet somber words:

... if the four great world religions could reconcile themselves to acknowledging transcendence as "the great unknown," then they might even be able to prevent the destruction of the earth's surface with gas and chemicals. Besides, it's the only way out—there is no other. We must enter into a conversation with the world religions. Maybe we have enough time; maybe we don't—I don't know.⁵³

51 Gadamer writes, "In all this [i.e., the religious realm] we have to acknowledge our ignorance. That, too, is the intention of my conviction about transcendence: it is human not to know. It is inhuman to turn this into a church." Zimmermann, "Ignoramus," 214.

52 Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy*, 116.

53 Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy*, 129.

Politicizing Religion: Cavanaugh, Lévinas and Lonergan in Dialogue¹

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Noted political theologian William Cavanaugh's work challenges the modern compartmentalization of religion and politics and advocates a greater role for the church in post-secular public life. Critics of his genealogical and ecclesiological agenda argue that Cavanaugh's work harbours an illiberal understanding of politics and a triumphalist view of the church. In this essay we collectively explore this tension by contrasting these two aspects of Cavanaugh's writings – the critical and the constructive – with the work of two different scholars: Lithuanian-French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and Canadian Catholic philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan. Michael Buttrey summarizes Cavanaugh's critique of the modern concept of religion as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon in *The Myth of Religious Violence*, connecting Cavanaugh's critique to his efforts in *Migrations of the Holy* to free the church from captivity to the secular imagination of modernity. Drawing upon Lévinas' ethics and political philosophy, Matthew Eaton suggests that violence in the political order exists regardless of who holds power, as politics and ethics are fundamentally irreconcilable notions. While justice may be achieved in a limited sense, Lévinas questions whether it is possible to discuss politics under the heading of ethics. While appreciative of certain aspects of Cavanaugh's critique of modernity, Nicholas Olkovich argues that Cavanaugh's genealogical propensities lead, in the limit case, to anthropological and soteriological positions that are in tension with Catholic teaching on natural law and the universality of God's grace. Olkovich appeals to the transcultural dimen-

1 This series of essays originated in a panel presentation concerning politics and religion at the Canadian Theological Society's annual meeting in Ottawa, June 2015.

sions of human knowing, choosing and religious experiencing that lie at the center of Lonergan's transposition of Aquinas' notions of nature and grace to offer an alternative reading of the relationship between the church and liberal democracy. Our extended discussion will close with a response by Buttrey to Eaton and Olkovich's critiques.

1.1 William Cavanaugh's Critique of 'Religion'

Cavanaugh's deconstruction of the typical Western concept of religion is made in the course of a critique of what he calls the myth of religious violence. In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Cavanaugh advances a thesis that there is "no transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion," meaning there is no way to separate the violence caused by religion from the violence caused by supposedly secular ideologies like nationalism, Marxism, and capitalism.² Cavanaugh sees his book as an attempt to get beyond the confusion created by the myth and ensure secular violence does not receive a free pass simply because it is perceived as not religious.

Cavanaugh begins by examining the work of John Hick, who argues that Christianity's claims to absolute truth have 'sanctified' violence.³ But according to Hick, the problem is not limited to Christianity: all religions are tempted to make their particular paths to truth absolute and deny their shared concern with ultimate reality. Defining religion in terms of ultimate importance allows Hick to include less obvious belief systems, such as Confucianism and Marxism, on his list of religions.⁴ As he explains, Marxism can be located "as a fairly distant cousin of such movements as Christianity and Islam, sharing some of their characteristics (such as a comprehensive worldview, with Scriptures, eschatology, saints, and a total moral claim) whilst lacking others (such as belief in a transcendent define reali-

2 William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

3 John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 18.

4 Hick draws on Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern" to define religion. See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4.

ty).”⁵ In referring to Marxism as a cousin, Hick is drawing on Wittgenstein’s metaphor of family resemblances.⁶ Yet because the family resemblance metaphor risks including all sorts of non-religions, Hick insists Marxism is a distant cousin compared to more central religions, such as Christianity and Confucianism.

In contrast, Cavanaugh argues that family members are central or distant depends on who is speaking. That is, Hick may see Confucianism as a more central member of the religion family, and Marxism as a distant cousin, but this is a product of his subjective location. A scholar from China would map the family differently. Therefore, Hick’s use of Wittgenstein does not solve the problem of defining religion, and as Cavanaugh puts it, “without a clear distinction between what is religious and what is not religious, any argument that religion per se does or does not cause violence becomes hopelessly arbitrary.”⁷ Of course, the problem of how to define religion is an established debate in the field of religious studies. Cavanaugh’s position is that religion is not a *transhistorical* concept that describes the same essential phenomena in all times and places. Rather, religion as we now understand it is an invention of the modern West, an idea that has been exported to the rest of the world and projected back into the past. To make his claim, Cavanaugh adduces a variety of evidence from the history of language, philosophy, and colonialism.

First, Cavanaugh looks at the roots of the English term ‘religion’ in the Latin *religio*. In ancient Rome, one’s *religio* might include seemingly secular matters like civic oaths and family rituals as well as cultic observances at temples.⁸ In *City of God*, Augustine uses *religio* for the action of praising God, but he emphasizes the word is ambiguous: *religio* “is displayed in human relationships, in the family ... and between friends.”⁹ In other words, for Augustine and other ancient

5 Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 5.

6 Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 4.

7 Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 21.

8 Thus Roman intellectuals like Cicero could practice *religio* without believing in the gods. Cavanaugh here draws on Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

9 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972), X.I (373).

writers *religio* is not a separate sphere of activity but a general aspect of social relations.

Next, Cavanaugh examines the meaning of religion in the Middle Ages. In medieval English, a *religion* was a monastic order, and members of an order were referred to as *religious*. Furthermore, for medieval Christians religion was not an institution separable from other spheres, like politics, for even matters of civil government were understood to be directed towards theological ends. As Cavanaugh puts it, “medieval Christendom was a theopolitical whole . . . the end of *religio* was inseparable from the end of politics,” which was ordered by the ultimate end of human life: “the enjoyment of God.”¹⁰ Therefore, the medieval meaning of religion is as foreign to our modern understanding as the ancient *religio*.

Indeed, the modern concept of religion is so different from its ancient and medieval antecedents that Cavanaugh argues it was *invented* in the modern West. That is, the modern meaning appeared after changes in the distribution of authority and power in the middle ages that allowed religion to refer to a realm distinct from the secular.¹¹ Although there are etymological similarities between modern religion and ancient *religio*, or between religion in modern usage and in 15th century England, the similar terms disguise a radically altered configuration of power.

Cavanaugh highlights John Locke as a key innovator in the spread of this idea of religion. First, through the Reformation the meaning of religion began to shift from a bodily discipline practiced by *some* to an institution concerned with a universal interior impulse. In turn, this shift allowed Locke to argue that religion is primarily private, and should therefore be free from government regulation and enforcement. Yet although Locke thought he was simply stating the timeless meaning of religion, Cavanaugh claims he and other modern thinkers were helping popularize religion as something distinct from

10 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 373; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 68.

11 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 82. In other words, Cavanaugh's work forms the needed counterpart to the recent genealogies of the secular offered by John Milbank and Charles Taylor. If “once, there was no secular,” then it logically follows that there was once no religion either (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 1.).

civil government and public society.¹² Second, Cavanaugh suggests this innovation was needed to justify the newfound authority of the nation-state. Previously, civil authority was – at least in theory – an arm of the church; now, the church would be subject to the state’s authority in every area except religion, understood as a voluntary matter of individual belief. This novel arrangement has since become so normative that we deride medieval Christians and modern Muslims for failing to separate religion from politics, forgetting that we ourselves recently invented the distinction.

Cavanaugh goes on to trace the expansion of the Western concept of religion to non-Western cultures through European colonization. Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism all become religions in the 19th century through a complex mix of pro- and anti-Western pressures, usually to the detriment of the native, non-Christian culture.¹³ Cavanaugh then concludes that to understand religion we must ask who defines it, and for what purpose.¹⁴ That is, if the definition of religion in different contexts arises from different configurations of power, then how a society defines religion says more about the society than about religion in general.

Now, Cavanaugh’s deconstruction of the myth of religious violence may initially appear distant from his work in ecclesiology, but it carries implications for the relationship between religion and politics. Typically, the violent potential of religion is used to justify state restrictions on religious practice, especially when it threatens national cohesion. Cavanaugh gives examples of such rhetoric in U.S. Supreme Court rulings. None of the cases offer an explicit definition of religion, but Cavanaugh sees repeated appeals to an implicit distinction between religion and patriotism that favours the latter, even when the word ‘god’ is invoked in patriotic ceremonies. This makes sense, Cavanaugh argues, because “religion – or more precisely, religion in

12 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 83.

13 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 86-99.

14 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 119. This concern with context marks Cavanaugh as having a constructivist view of religion, as he clarifies in his response to a review symposium on Myth. See William T. Cavanaugh, “Spaces of Recognition: A Reply to My Interlocutors,” *Pro Ecclesia* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 359–60.

public – is what the liberal nation-state saves us from.”¹⁵ Now, Cavanaugh does not want to dismantle the separation of church and state. Rather, he objects to the radical dichotomy between private religion and public patriotism, which encourages paranoia about religious engagement in public discourse while giving a free pass to the secular religion of nationalism.

As we will see, Cavanaugh’s foray into the popular and academic study of religion is consistent with his broader project of critiquing the modern social imagination that segregates the church and Christianity to a sphere of society labelled as religious. This does not mean Cavanaugh is being disingenuous in advertising his book as religion-neutral. Clearly Islam would also benefit from reduced Western paranoia about mixing religion and politics, and Cavanaugh appears to be sincere when he condemns the use of the myth of religious violence to justify violence against Muslims and Muslim countries. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the possible benefits of Cavanaugh’s arguments for Christian witness and ecclesiology, and on this basis it is clear *The Myth of Religious Violence* implicitly advances a concern to enable increased participation in public life by the church, not just religion in general.¹⁶

1.2 William Cavanaugh’s Political Theology

Increasing the participation of the church in public life is a key emphasis of Cavanaugh’s work in political theology. In *Migrations of the Holy*, Cavanaugh critiques what he calls politically *indirect* ecclesiologies, against which he advocates politically *direct* ecclesiologies that reject the privatization of the church. In politically indirect ecclesiologies, the church’s influence is indirect in two senses: the church influences the state only through the activities of Christian

15 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 192.

16 The almost entirely critical force of his argument in *Myth* would be rather quixotic if Cavanaugh did not have any positive agenda for religion. In his review of *Myth*, Vincent Lloyd argues that Cavanaugh’s vocation as a theologian, his other works, and his affinities with Radical Orthodoxy suggest his unofficial purpose is to present a genealogy “that serves to make plausible the Christian myths” (Vincent Lloyd, “Violence: Religious, Theological, Ontological,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 5 (2011): 153). Criticizing the myth of religious violence serves this goal by making the myths of the nation-state seem arbitrary.

citizens, and its theology is understood to need translation into a “more publicly accessible form of discourse” to influence society.¹⁷ For Cavanaugh, indirect ecclesiologies like those offered by Jacques Maritain, John Courtney Murray, and Reinhold Niebuhr refuse to recognize the political nature of the church, accepting the modern myth that religion is inherently violent and best kept private, subservient to the properly public and unifying politics of the nation-state. Cavanaugh insists Christians cannot acquiesce to such an apolitical understanding of the church, for they understand salvation as “a fully public event that unfolds in [history] before the watching eyes of the nations.”¹⁸

Therefore, Cavanaugh turns to the more direct political ecclesiologies of Oliver O’Donovan and Stanley Hauerwas. O’Donovan’s generous account of Christendom may be scandalous to modern sensibilities, but Cavanaugh appreciates how O’Donovan makes Christendom *explicable* by arguing that fourth century Christians “did not simply become drunk with power,” but believed God was bringing the earthly powers under his reign, as prophesied and anticipated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ.¹⁹ Like O’Donovan, Cavanaugh does not see Christendom as the fall of the church from its prior state of spiritual purity. Indeed, he suggests that it would have been irresponsible for bishops to abandon their flock amid the chaos that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.

At the same time, Cavanaugh welcomes the freeing of the church from Christendom, and is cautious about O’Donovan’s emphasis on “biblical images of rule.”²⁰ Therefore, Cavanaugh highlights Stanley Hauerwas’s view of the church as a contrast model to the state. According to Cavanaugh, in such a model the church embodies a different politics, one that is marked by weakness, not violence. Of course, critics of Hauerwas often complain that his politics is sectarian, but Cavanaugh makes a telling point about this accusation of sectarianism: it assumes the state is catholic. Originally, a sect was a group

17 William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 132.

18 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 124.

19 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 128. His italics.

20 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 138.

of Christians who rejected the authority of the wider church; but in contemporary use, a sect is any “group whose practices put it at odds with the dominant culture and political elites of the nation-state.”²¹ Why is sectarianism a concern? Because the state is understood to be the truly universal body that carries the meaning of history. Therefore, the accusation of sectarianism reveals an implicit captivity to the dominant social imagination of modernity, where only the state is universal and the church, religion, and even God are reduced to subservient roles.

Cavanaugh’s concern to overcome this enfeebling imagination continues in his constructive ecclesiology. First, he suggests we consider the state as a liturgy, or *performance*, in civil society. Cavanaugh acknowledges that the idea of national liturgies sounds offensive to modern ears, but he wants to recover the original meaning of *leitourgia* as any corporate, public work, including shared national rituals. As examples, he highlights how Americans are taught a national catechesis that includes: reciting a creed, the Pledge of Allegiance; celebrating feast days of Independence, Memorial, and Thanksgiving; singing hymns like the Star Spangled Banner at public events; and respecting the American Flag. The last is the most telling, for there are regular calls for an amendment against desecrating the flag, which implies that the flag is a sacred object.²² As Cavanaugh explains, “American civil religion can never acknowledge that it is in fact a religion: to do so would be to invite charges of idolatry.”²³ Still, in light of the willingness of most Americans, Christians included, to sacrifice their bodies for their country, the cognitive separation between civil religion and real religion is perhaps a distinction without a difference. National rituals are not innocuously secular, but the functional equivalent of a religion, one that demands adherents be ready to fight

21 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 139.

22 Consider Chief Justice Rehnquist’s strident dissent to *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397 (1989): “The flag is not simply another ‘idea’ or ‘point of view’ competing for recognition in the marketplace of ideas. Millions and millions of Americans regard it with an almost mystical reverence regardless of what sort of social, political, or philosophical beliefs they may have.” (429)

23 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 119.

and kill for its sake, and remember the glorious dead for making the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

Next, Cavanaugh contrasts national liturgies with an explicitly dramatic analogy for the church. After presenting Augustine's two cities as two dramatic performances, Cavanaugh illustrates the analogy with Richard Strauss's opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In the opera, the scripted story of Ariadne collides with an improvised comedy when both are performed simultaneously on the same stage. This alters the plot: instead of awaiting death after she is abandoned by her lover, Ariadne falls in love with the new character of Bacchus, changing the original tragic ending to a happy one. Similarly, Cavanaugh argues "the earthly city and the city of God are two intermingled performances, one a tragedy, the other a comedy."²⁴ Here also, both performances take place simultaneously on one stage – the world – and the church takes on the role of the improvisational comedy troupe interrupting the violent tragedy of the nation-state. The church is therefore not separate from the world, concerned only with private spiritual matters, but a practiced group that "joins with others to perform the city of God."²⁵ Likewise, the city of God is not restricted to the space of the church, but is made visible in the world for all to see.

This analogy of the church as performing (and improvising) the story of the city of God overcomes a primary impediment to the church's public witness: its conception as a space. As Cavanaugh acknowledges, it is difficult to avoid conceiving of the church and state without lapsing into spatial metaphors for their relationship. To modern Westerners, thinking of the church as one part of society fits with the inclination to view religion and/or spirituality as one part of human life. However, Cavanaugh's illustration of *Ariadne auf Naxos* changes the context of these parts from a spatial metaphor to a dramatic one. The church is not a part of society; rather, it has a part to play in society, and not as a bit character, but in a major role. Furthermore, this play is not directed by the forces of history, inexorably marching towards progress (or destruction), but has already been placed within the larger story of redemption in Christ. Therefore, the

24 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 64.

25 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 66.

church is not limited to fighting with the state over how much space, or power, it needs or deserves. Instead, it is free to improvise a variety of responses to the story being told by the nation-state (and others).

2.0 Cavanaugh and Lévinas in Dialogue

In response to Michael's Buttrey's assessment of William Cavanaugh's political theology, I question Cavanaugh's apparent Christian triumphalism and offer an alternative political theology grounded in the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas.²⁶ My critique is aimed primarily at Cavanaugh's Augustinian ecclesiology and the political theology that follows. Cavanaugh suggests that the Church proclaims a counter-voice and an alternative politics to the state. In contrast to the inherent violence of a state liturgy rooted in power-over the other, the Church proclaims a liturgy characterized by weakness and vulnerability. As such, there exists a stark contrast between the goodness of the liturgy of Jesus, marked by the Eucharist, love, and weakness, and the liturgy of Mars, marked by the state's demands for allegiance, and peace-through-violence. Thus, the world appears for Cavanaugh to operate according to a certain reading of Augustinian thinking that juxtaposes the City of God with the earthly city.

2.1 Lévinas' Ethics as First Philosophy and Theology

A Lévinasian response to Cavanaugh's ecclesiology rests in his peculiar understanding of ethics as responsibility for the other, irreducible to any subjective horizon. Face-to-face, affective encounters with the corporeal frailty of another are for Lévinas the fundamental optics for all subsequent philosophical, theological, and juridical reflection. Such encounters bestow responsibility on the subject and occur within an-archic, affective time prior to cognitive representation and normative conceptualization.²⁷ The matrix of human reflec-

26 Lévinas' principal works include *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

27 On anarchy and temporality, see "Humanism and An-Archy" in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague-Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 127-39; "Diachrony and Representation" in *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 97-120; *Otherwise than Being*, esp. 99-129.

tion then is always already confronted with responsibility for another who is irreducible to a subjective horizon. This Infinity of the other serves as a divine authority in making a subject responsible prior to any freedom of choice. Ethics then cannot equate to the calculation of one's interior processes, nor can it be normalized into universals. Likewise, ethics cannot be translated into any institutionalized system, including political or religious ideologies. Ethics is rooted in particular relational encounters and takes the form of the unique responsibility demanded in face-to-face encounters. For Lévinas, this is the humanist basis of thinking and grounds philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence. While these types of reflections appeal to the Good encountered in the face-to-face, the concrete justice and goodness they offer is always ambiguous because it cannot account for the totality of corporeal frailty or absolutely eschew violence.²⁸

The summons described by Lévinas comes to the subject with the height of Divine authority; "it is as if God spoke through the face."²⁹ The frailty of another is above the perceiving subject, positioned as the command of a corporeal existent that is inseparable from transcendent Divinity. The authority rests in a call to respect the exteriority of the other's speech concerning its own world so as to not reduce another's world to one's interiority. While such an event cannot be perfectly apprehended by a subject, it nonetheless witnesses a trace of Divinity within possibility of relationship, but still beyond comprehension, always overflowing what a subject might think concerning it.³⁰ It is not that the subject is ruled out as contributing to the encounter, but is prohibited from circumscribing the identity of another under the assumption that one's interior horizon is sufficient for understanding difference. The ethical emerges as the awakening of a subject to responsibility without recourse to *a priori* principles

28 While the ethical is a face-to-face summons to responsibility, the world is never simply you and I. There is always a third, a fourth, a fifth, etc., forcing the moral choices one makes to decide between a plurality of summons, and compare faces that are fundamentally incomparable. See e.g., *Totality and Infinity*, 212-15.

29 Emmanuel Lévinas, Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, "The Paradox of Morality," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 169.

30 Cf. René Descartes' "Third Meditation," in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 24-35.

and beyond one's power to contain the Good within a totality. In the affective, an-archic event of ethics, the other reveals an Infinity that refuses reductionism. This is the humanistic foundation for Lévinas' philosophy, and serves as the primordial event prior to and grounding all human thinking. The irreducible singularity of such encounters, manifest within an infinite plurality of forms, demands pluralist responses dependent on manifest needs. As such, no idealist system, political, religious or otherwise, is adequate to serve as a normative ethical matrix.

2.2 Cavanaugh's Ecclesiology and Lévinas' Ethics

Within this wider framework, I will briefly explore some concerns with Cavanaugh's political theology, based on his ecclesiology, the apparent triumphalism of his positions, and the ethics outlined in the works of Lévinas. As seen above, Cavanaugh describes the Christian church as Augustine's City of God, a liturgy of goodness and light, whereas the non-Christian state contrasts as the earthly city, a liturgy of banality and violence. There is thus a radical juxtaposition of competing moral values in each city that have little, if anything, to add to one another, the City of God alone being good and the earthly city being morally bankrupt. Based on Lévinas' ethics, I am left questioning whether the Church and state truly exist in such a starkly contrasting relationship. Following Lévinas, I suggest a deeper nuancing of the relationship between the Church, other faith traditions, the state, and ethics.

It seems that morality is more complex than Cavanaugh's position allows and that the moral compass of both church and state could be shown to point in wildly different directions at various times and in various embodiments. While the nation-state cannot be seen as a paragon of moral virtue based on any reading of the Christian narrative, neither can it be seen as morally bankrupt, as if grace, goodness, mercy, and compassion were the sole possession of Christianity. What are we to make, e.g., when the cries of the citizens of a nation lead to state sponsored support of political change that appears just, and which is often met with varying responses from a church that is in no way politically unified? One option, found in Augustine's City of God, would be to suggest that the contrasting cities

are not simply reduced to earthly institutions, and that the good and the banal are mixed together in both Church and state.³¹ Institutions, lacking personhood, would be morally ambiguous and we might find the good and the bad within both, and as such goodness and banality enacted within both. Yet, such a reading still strictly associates morality with Christianity, maintaining the dualism of a holy Church and a banal world.

While supporting an opposition to the violence of the state, my fear is that this reading as a whole is either a caricature of the church and the world, or that Cavanaugh's judgment of tradition is restricted to his own interior experience of the singular framework that he associates with goodness. The apparent Christian triumphalism here, according to Lévinas, ignores the humanist foundation of ethics and reduces the other to the same, failing to dignify what is beyond the Christian tradition. Can the state be so easily reduced to the threat of an evil specter, judged apart from exteriority by an *a priori* interiority that disqualifies the other as capable of mercy, compassion, and justice? Similarly, how exactly is the Church the singular paragon of the good in the world, given its history? The church is hardly a purely power-oppositional system that embraces the weak, the poor, and the oppressed. And even if we follow Augustine and allow for a mixture of the good and the banal within Earth's institutions, is not the affirmation of the Church's superior goodness violence against the other by denying the humanist foundation of ethics? Cavanaugh's twin city imagery poses two—and only two—competing liturgies rather than a world full of different dynamic voices nuanced with complex particularities. Could not the Mosque and the Synagogue defiantly sing an alternate liturgy in contrast to the worship of Mars?

Following Lévinas, I would suggest that a politic of weakness as advocated above would assume a more humble approach to difference. In such a model, the voices of other subjects would open one up to being a part of a wider community that eschewed a dualist political and ethical normativity. It would instead allow for a greater degree of partnership amongst difference and not reduce shared convictions for the Good to the framework of one's own tradition. It would even

31 See e.g., *The City of God*, XVIII, 49; XIX, 17

refuse to judge those who embrace the state, or the state itself apart from an appeal to its own particularity, which is invariably more complex than presented above. The Christian voice would be one voice amongst the wider human community capable of a goodness expressed in an infinite plurality of forms. This is not to say that there are no normative standards for ethics and politics, but it would resist a dualist conception of frameworks that *a priori* denigrates other voices in asserting they have nothing to offer the world because they do not fall into one specific conceptual framework. There would be nothing against Cavanaugh's "politically direct ecclesiology" in this regard, but following Lévinas it suggests that one's ecclesiology should partner with society, recognizing no one group, system, or ideology has a monopoly on holiness, love, and mercy. As such, a pluralist model could embrace the ethos of a tradition by recognizing the universality of grace in the world, and the value of other voices without asserting any dominant superiority. Ethics is a human inheritance, and not the possession of the Church or something that can be called, at its root, Christian. Ethics is the ground of human subjectivity, giving rise to various philosophical, theological, and political frameworks, all of which are ambiguous in performing the Good demanded by the Other.

The ambiguity of idealist systems and ideologies, religious, political or otherwise, demands humility rather than triumphalism because all action taken toward justice involves a degree of violence. For Lévinas, justice opens from ethics, but always takes a particular, conceptual shape and thus betrays its ideal. Justice and consequent goodness amounts to the concrete calculation of the an-archic, affective event of ethics. Yet, subjects or societies aiming to carry responsibility forward are unable to apprehend the Infinity of others, and account for the totality of society. As the ethical unfolds into justice and goodness, there is never simply you and I, but you and I, and a third, a fourth, a fifth, toward infinity. We exist in a matrix wherein the embrace of one may also be the denial of another. Justice, opening from the ethical but faced with the totality of society with pluralistic needs, always betrays even the best intentions to embrace another.³²

32 See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 23-59.

While this does not rule out the possibility of goodness manifest in justice, what goodness there is in the world comes at the price of a betrayal, and suggests the impossibility of the ethical manifest in the political, regardless of who is in charge. As such, it would be wise to eschew triumphalism and assertions of the superiority of any idealist system or ideology, as even the best among human frameworks emerges as paradox and betrayal of another.

2.3 Conclusion

While questioning the ability of any political framework to encompass ethics in any absolute form, we cannot allow such a position to paralyze existence. At a certain point, we must calculate and make choices on how our world should look, be it at the price of a betrayal. As such, regardless of the differences in the technicalities of thought, in many ways Lévinas and Cavanaugh would stand together against the violence of liturgies devoted to Mars, whenever he leads the state into the utterly banal abuses of war and economic exploitation. A Christ centered ecclesiology should eschew egregious violence in favor of a different ethos, even if this betrays an inescapable violence arising in comparing what is incomparable. And yet, I would suggest that the Christian Church make room for other voices rooted in a humanist ethic, including those embracing the liberal democracy of our own nation-states who seek to eschew violence in the midst of a world that will never be Good and never apprehend God, but where goodness is nevertheless a possibility. The kingdom of God opens up out of a more basic human inheritance that is and will always be prior to and beyond the Church.

3. Cavanaugh and Lonergan in Dialogue³³

William T. Cavanaugh's work is dedicated to recovering the theological imagination of the Christian community in contemporary liberal democratic contexts. In what follows I will augment and assess Michael Buttrey's summary of the relationship between two aspects of

³³ I want to thank Michael Buttrey for encouraging Matthew and myself to read Cavanaugh's work. In preparation I worked through three of Cavanaugh's major works: *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T & T Clark, 2002); *The Myth of Religious Violence*; and *Migrations of the Holy*.

Cavanaugh's work, the critical or genealogical and the constructive or ecclesiological. My remarks proceed in three main stages. First, I distinguish between two interrelated features subject to deconstruction in Cavanaugh's account of modernity: (a) the relationship between religion and politics or between religion and the secular;³⁴ and (b) the relationship between radical individualism and the attendant prioritization of market ideology.³⁵ Second, I highlight two ways in which Lonergan and Cavanaugh's critique of modernity overlaps. Third, in spite of this agreement, I argue that Cavanaugh's genealogical propensities lead, in the limit case, to anthropological and soteriological positions that are in tension with Catholic teaching on natural law and the universality of God's grace.

3.1 Cavanaugh's Genealogical Deconstruction of Modernity

The first feature of modernity Cavanaugh deconstructs is the Enlightenment-inspired distinction between politics and religion and the related claim that religious believers are intrinsically absolutist, divisive, and irrational.³⁶ These characteristics contribute to violence, expressed historically in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Wars of Religion.³⁷ In response, Enlightenment authors and their contemporary supporters call for the differentiation of religion from politics.³⁸ In contrast with premodern religion, the establishment of a purportedly rational and independent secular realm breeds the capacity to recognize and respect a wide diversity of conceptions of human fulfillment. The resulting privatization of religion is further facilitated by the early modern discovery of religion's essential core, an interior, predominantly affective disposition "removed from its

34 This is the main focus of Cavanaugh's *The Myth of Religious Violence*.

35 This connection is articulated in various parts of all three works but most especially in *Theopolitical Imagination*.

36 Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 17-18.

37 See for example: Cavanaugh, *Myth*, ch. 3; and *Theopolitical Imagination*, ch. 1. See also William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (New York: Routledge, 1999), 182-200.

38 See for example: Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 31-42; and *Myth*, ch. 2.

particular ecclesial context” that finds expression in certain beliefs that remain separable from politics and economics.³⁹

In all of his work, Cavanaugh argues to a greater or lesser extent that the modern religion-secular distinction presupposes an individualist anthropology that finds expression in the work of authors such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.⁴⁰ Each of these authors characterizes the subject that inhabits the state of nature as radically asocial and prone to competition for power and property.⁴¹ This conception of the subject is complemented by a truncated form of soteriology that associates salvation with the alleviation of self-interested and sectarian forms of violence made possible by the establishment via contract of civil governance. By reducing the common good to collectivized self-interest, liberal societies prioritize market ideology and marginalize alternative visions of the human good.⁴²

Drawing on postmodern philosophy, Cavanaugh develops a genealogical reading of modernity that exposes the contingency of the religion-secular distinction and its related individualist anthropology. More specifically, Cavanaugh regards both features as ideologically-motivated cover stories created to support the legitimation of the modern nation-state, self-interested acquisitiveness, and the marginalization of religion.⁴³ This movement results in what Cavanaugh calls the “migration of the holy” from the “international church” to the twin-poles of the nation-state and the market.⁴⁴ According to Cavanaugh, far from representing the progressive unfolding of Enlightenment rationality and tolerance, this transfer of allegiance results in the establishment of distorted forms of religious commitment. The quiet triumph of American “civil religion” and market

39 Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 33, n.56. This is the main argument of *Myth*, ch. 2. See especially 69-85.

40 See for example: Cavanaugh, “The City,” 186-190; *Theopolitical*, 15-20, 43-46; Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 80, n.117; Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is Not the Keeper of the Common Good,” in *Migrations*, 19-24.

41 See especially, Cavanaugh, “The City,” 186-90; and *Theopolitical*, 15-20. See also Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 124-30.

42 Cavanaugh, “Killing,” 23-24. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 43-46, 73-80.

43 See for example, Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 4, 7, 9-10, 120-21, 179.

44 Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 10-11.

ideology provides an alternative centre of gravity for a post-Christian world that contributes, in an American context, to forms of Messianic “exceptionalism.”⁴⁵ The latter sanctions state violence in support of efforts to spread democracy and capitalism around the globe.⁴⁶

3.2 Overlapping Concerns: Cavanaugh and Lonergan

Cavanaugh’s critique of modernity ought to be commended on two fronts. First, Cavanaugh is correct that the religion-secular distinction has been and continues to be used inappropriately to marginalize religious voices in the public sphere. Cavanaugh’s deconstruction of rigid forms of secularism could reorient public discourse in ways that better respect historical consciousness or what Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan regards as an empirical notion of culture.⁴⁷ Second, Cavanaugh’s criticism of the dominance of market ideology is perceptive and mirrors what Lonergan calls the “general bias of common sense.”⁴⁸ Hobbes, Locke, and their contemporary neoliberal successors all tend to view the individual as structured by a combination of spontaneous egoism and instrumental reason, the confluence of which counsels the establishment of a political community capable of protecting mutual self-interest.⁴⁹ General bias is a truncation of the human good that arises when self-interested distortions of practical intelligence bar the expression of cultural meanings and values capable of passing critical judgment on individ-

45 Cavanaugh, “Messianic Nation: A Christian Theological Critique of American Exceptionalism,” in *Migrations*, 88-108. Cavanaugh examines the reality of ‘civil religion’ in *Myth*, 110, 113-20. See also Cavanaugh, “The Liturgies of Church and State,” in *Migrations*, 115-22. For the notion of market ideology as ‘religion’ see: *Myth*, 22, 58, 107-9; and *Theopolitical*, 73-80.

46 Cavanaugh, *Myth*, ch. 4.

47 See Bernard Lonergan, “The Human Good as Object: Differentials and Integration,” in *Topics in Education*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 76-78; Bernard Lonergan, “Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,” in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985), 170-71.

48 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 250-51, 253-57, 262.

49 Bernard Lonergan, “Human Good as Object: Invariant Structure,” *Topics in Education*, 42, 45-47.

ual desires and the social orders that serve them.⁵⁰ From this perspective, culture loses its independence and instead comes to serve as a theoretical rationalization for the modern state's distorted views of the subject and society.⁵¹ Against this, Cavanaugh's deconstruction of the modern state's purportedly rational prioritization of economic concerns serves, at least potentially, to reorient public discourse to include a variety of alternative cultural frameworks.

3.3 Anthropological and Soteriological Tensions in Cavanaugh: A Lonerganian Reading

At the same time, there are lingering tensions in Cavanaugh's work that distinguish his response to the contemporary situation from Lonergan's. More specifically, I contend that despite his attempts to differentiate pejorative from benign objectifications of the norms implicit in modern ethical and political practice, Cavanaugh tends to equate modernity in general with its aberrational expression. By contrast, Lonergan is concerned to differentiate modernity's structural achievements from their distortions, a challenge more in keeping with Vatican II's call for *aggiornamento*. There are two issues at stake in this potential rehabilitation, issues roughly correlative with what the Thomist tradition regards as nature and grace. In what follows I point out the tension that exists in Cavanaugh's thought concerning both notions, his default tendency to side with Christian particularity, and then Lonergan's alternative.

First, there exists a tension in Cavanaugh's response to the rise of constitutional democracy. On the one hand, Cavanaugh continually affirms the value of the separation of church and state.⁵² On the other hand, Cavanaugh's tendency to conceive alternative cultural-linguistic frameworks as distinctive religions, theologies, or mythologies leaves little space for a principled commitment to democratic norms that would distinguish his position from a mere *modus vivendi*.⁵³ Any attempt to conceive of a normative distinction between politics and

50 See Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 73-80.

51 Lonergan, *Insight*, 255-57, 262. Lonergan, "Differentials," 65.

52 See for example: Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 14, 121, 179, 192.

53 The term *modus vivendi* is taken from John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

religion or between philosophy and theology appears to stand prone to genealogical deconstruction. In other words, Cavanaugh seems committed to evacuating the secular or transcultural side of this distinction entirely while shifting all conceptual frameworks to the status of contingent ‘religions.’ This sort of critique underlies Cavanaugh’s rejection of politically “indirect ecclesiologies” that appeal to some prior consensus, such as natural law, capable of providing a thin conception of the good shared-in-common by members of communities who hold alternative thick commitments.⁵⁴ What Cavanaugh is left with is the particularity of the Christian community, a particularity that stands in tension with the particularity of other traditions.⁵⁵ This conclusion is no doubt in keeping with Cavanaugh’s efforts to widen discourse in the public sphere but it appears to come at the price of criteria capable of governing both intra- and inter-tradition discourse.

For Lonergan, the deconstruction of pejorative variations of the religion-secular distinction that center on the myths of religious violence and Enlightenment rationality does not lead to the conclusion that all variations of this distinction are philosophically indefensible. According to Lonergan, the rise of historical consciousness challenges Christians to discover transcultural norms that govern intra- and inter-tradition dialogue and debate that respect rather than deny the historicity of human meaning. The key to redrawing the religion-secular distinction from this perspective lies in distinguishing the cultural-linguistic determinations constitutive of any particular tradition from the transcendental source and norm of all concepts, judgments and their ongoing revision.⁵⁶ In other words, Lonergan remains willing to distinguish the variety of *a posteriori* horizons correlative with the conceptual frameworks or ‘religions’ that Cavanaugh so strongly affirms from the subject’s *a priori* basic horizon constituted by her transcendental desire for intelligibility, reality and value. In response to the contemporary crisis of meaning that Cavanaugh’s

54 See ch. 2, “The Myth of Civil Society as Free Space,” in *Theopolitical Imagination* and Cavanaugh, “The Church as Political,” in *Migrations*, 131-36.

55 This fact is perhaps most clear in *Theopolitical Imagination*, 43-52.

56 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 11.

deconstruction of distorted forms of transculturality helps expose, Lonergan commends a process of cognitive and existential self-appropriation whereby the developing subject objectifies, verifies and takes open-eyed control of her conscious intentional striving.⁵⁷ It is my contention that the heuristic account of human fulfillment correlative with the subject's *a priori* basic horizon provides a historically-conscious account of natural law, a thin conception of the good implicit in democratic reason-exchange. Although Christians may continue to appeal to their thick commitments in this reconstituted public sphere, since the truth of such historical claims is never more than at best highly probable, no particular account of human fulfillment may supersede the heuristic account. In this way, Lonergan's transposed notion of natural law provides an alternative anthropological foundation for democratic practice that is compatible with both pluralism and Christian commitment.

The second tension that is present in Cavanaugh's work centers on the presence and reality of sanctifying grace. On the one hand, Cavanaugh is at pains to affirm Vatican II's stance on the universal offer of God's grace.⁵⁸ At the same time, Cavanaugh holds two positions that would appear to contradict this affirmation. First, Cavanaugh quite explicitly denies the existence of a transcultural inner subjective experience that Wilfred Cantwell Smith labels "faith."⁵⁹ In my judgment, in order to speak about salvation as correlative with something more than simply nominal membership in the Body of Christ one needs to be able to identify the transcultural dimensions of grace within human consciousness and history. Second, Cavanaugh tends to dichotomize the relationship between liberal democracy and the church in a way that correlates the former with historical decline and the latter with redemption.⁶⁰ This Augustinian-tinged church-world dualism tends to restrict the availability of Christian salvation to those who participate in the "Eucharistic counter-politics" of the

57 Lonergan, *Method*, 14-18, 38, 83, 240.

58 See for example: "The Sinfulness and Visibility of the Church: A Christological Exploration," in *Migrations*, 152; and Cavanaugh, "From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space," in *Migrations*, 66.

59 Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 101-2.

60 This is most apparent in *Theopolitical Imagination*, 46-52.

visible Christian communion.⁶¹ For Lonergan, however, sanctifying grace is a theoretical term that points to the experience of unrestricted being-in-love, a datum of consciousness offered to all human beings that incipiently fulfills and strengthens the subject's transcendental desire for value.⁶² Religious experience, far from being created by language-use, is a pre-verbal reality that is only subsequently interpreted by diverse religious traditions. The corresponding process of religious self-appropriation moves from *a posteriori* interpretations of religious love to the recognition that religious experience is a transcultural phenomenon. Since the historically-conditioned interpretations of the reality encountered in the experience of religious love are at best highly probable, Lonergan's transposition of sanctifying grace counsels religious freedom and mutual respect between adherents of different faiths.

3.4 Conclusion

Although Lonergan shares many of Cavanaugh's concerns, I have contended that there are tensions in Cavanaugh's work whose resolution may in fact distance his response to modernity from Lonergan's. On my reading of Cavanaugh, the deconstruction of the myth of secular rationality leads to the rejection of all transcultural norms, a move that reduces all particular conceptual frameworks to the status of 'religions.' In a similar way, Cavanaugh's tendency to read all attempts to identify the essence of religion as inextricably bound up with the modern project's marginalization of religion leads, in the limit, to a church-world dualism that appears incapable of accounting for the universality of grace. In both cases one finds a particularism that appears to be the product of Cavanaugh's genealogical proclivities. In response I introduced Lonergan's rehabilitation of the modern turn to the subject in general and his transpositions of nature and grace in particular. The former provides foundations for democratic practice that avoid Cavanaugh's critique. The latter provides the basis for speaking about salvation outside of the visible Christian communion in an intelligible way.

61 Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 46-52.

62 Lonergan, *Method*, 106-7

4. Response

I'm delighted to have the opportunity to read and respond to Matthew Eaton and Nicholas Olkovich's excellent critiques of Cavanaugh. The Lévinasian and Lonerganian criticisms they put forward are thoughtful, serious, and very different from each other, making it challenging to address both in a brief response. Therefore, in this final section I will primarily attempt to address Eaton's charge of triumphalism, and conclude with a few questions for Olkovich's concerns about Cavanaugh.

Cavanaugh himself is aware of the charge of triumphalism, and attempts to address it by giving a constructive proposal for how we can simultaneously affirm the witness and sinfulness of the church. He does this by drawing on Chalcedonian Christology and emphasizing the analogy between Christology and ecclesiology. As he explains, the council of Chalcedon affirmed the biblical theme that Christ became sin, a humiliation for God, but one freely assumed in order to save humanity. Or as Cavanaugh puts it, "in the drama of salvation sin does not simply obscure the visibility of the divine glory, but helps make it manifest in the form of the humiliated God."⁶³ Therefore, in Chalcedon Cavanaugh finds a refusal to protect Christ from sin, an insight he hopes to adopt for ecclesiology.

At the same time, Cavanaugh recognizes that there is not a one-to-one relationship between Christology and ecclesiology. In his words, the church is "Christ's body, not his divinity" and it "plays the part of sinful humanity" in the ongoing drama of sin and salvation.⁶⁴ Because the drama is ultimately a comedy, the church lives in hope; yet as a pilgrim people, on the road, the church cannot escape its sinfulness. Cavanaugh integrates these diverse tensions by placing penitence at the core of the church. Specifically, he argues that instead of sin negating the holiness of the church, "The holiness of the church is visible in its very repentance for its sin. The church is visibly holy not because it is pure, but precisely because it shows to the world what sin looks like."⁶⁵ In other words, Cavanaugh's response to the charge

63 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 160-61.

64 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 162. Cavanaugh's use of theatrical metaphors is clearly inspired by Balthasar.

65 Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 165.

of triumphalism is that the church should indeed be a model for the world, but a model of *repentance*, not purity. Only in the recognition and repentance of sin can the church maintain its visibility alongside its sinfulness and witness to a world that does not know sin, or God.

Now, even with Cavanaugh's insistence that the church is not pure, but sinful, I suspect Eaton is quite right to argue that Cavanaugh's ecclesiology is insufficiently pluralist for Lévinas' taste. However, I would contend that Cavanaugh's distinction between the nation-state and civil society, and his definition of the state and the church as liturgies or performances *within* civil society, support a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between church and society than the stark polarization Eaton critiques. Overall, though, I share Eaton's sense that Cavanaugh and Lévinas have a common concern with the inherent violence of the modern nation-state, and would be allies in the project of deconstructing its myths and liturgies.

Indeed, some aspects of Cavanaugh's thought are perhaps surprisingly closer to that of Lévinas, a French continental philosopher, than those of Bernard Lonergan, a fellow Catholic theologian. Certainly Olkovich's summary of Cavanaugh's postmodern method and presuppositions is correct, and Olkovich may also be right that Cavanaugh's lack of interest in natural law or transcultural norms limits his ability to engage in democratic reason-exchange, although I am not sure Cavanaugh would see this as a problem, given that he is attempting to undermine one of the founding myths of modern politics. Likely more worrying for Cavanaugh is the charge that he appears to contradict Vatican II's emphasis on the universal offer of God's grace by denying the existence of what Wilfred Cantwell Smith calls "faith." However, I note Cavanaugh understands himself to be defending Aquinas, against Smith, for associating "*religio* with both inner and outward expressions."⁶⁶ Cavanaugh's appeal to Aquinas here suggests he is attempting to recover a premodern understanding of religion less reliant on experience alone, which I suspect may need a more in-depth examination before it can be compared to the more modern sensibilities of Vatican II and Bernard Lonergan. Still, I take

66 Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 102.

Olkovich's point that Cavanaugh's presuppositions, methodology, and conclusions are in tension with some major strands of modern Catholic theology.

Unapologetically (A)Political - Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching

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Introduction

Stanley Hauerwas's many contributions to the disciplines of Christian theology and ethics have been widely recognized and debated. However, the increasingly important place that preaching has come to occupy in his work has, for the most part, been largely overlooked.¹ Since 2004, Hauerwas has published no less than five collections of sermons—a testament to the great importance he ascribes to the practice of preaching.² Not only is preaching close to Hauerwas's heart, but considering preaching with Hauerwas leads one into the heart of his theological project. In this paper I will argue that Hauerwas's conception of preaching must be understood within the context of his broader theological politics. This makes preaching an intensely

1 Both John Thomson and Samuel Wells have observed and briefly commented upon Hauerwas's publication of an increasing number of sermons. Both works, however, precede the explosion of sermons published by Hauerwas in the last ten years. John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 144-45; Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene: Cascade, 2004), 123.

2 Stanley Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers, and Sundries* (Eugene: Cascade, 2004); Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); Stanley Hauerwas, *Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011); Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology: Sermons for Christ's Church* (New York: Seabury, 2013). It is perhaps a bit of a stretch to identify *Working with Words* as a collection of sermons, since only seven of the book's twenty-one chapters are sermons. However, this is how Hauerwas identifies the book in his introduction to *Without Apology*, xiin1. Reflecting the importance Hauerwas ascribes to these works is the advice he offers to potential readers, "If you can only read a little Hauerwas, read one of these books. They are what I care most about." *Cross-Shattered Church*, 9.

political activity, although not in the sense of what is generally recognized as political in modern liberal democratic societies. I will then suggest that Hauerwas's account of the theological politics of preaching has great emancipatory potential for the contemporary practice of preaching which can help to liberate preaching from its enslavement to modern political assumptions and arrangements for the sake of bold proclamation of the Gospel.

“Preaching is the most political of tasks,” Hauerwas asserts in his introduction to a collection of sermons entitled *Disrupting Time*.³ This is so, not because preachers are called to devote themselves to addressing the hot-button political issues of the day. Rather, preaching is the most political of tasks, because “preaching presupposes and forms a people.”⁴ Hauerwas's understanding of the politics of preaching is very different from much of what is commonly associated with political preaching today. The difference between Hauerwas's understanding of the politics of preaching and contemporary political preaching is analogous to the distinction introduced by Arne Rasmussen between political theology and theological politics. Political theology, according to Rasmussen, is primarily an apologetic endeavour which, operating according to the canons of modernity, seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Christian practice and theology for the agonistic form of modern political processes.⁵ As a result, political theology takes for granted the fundamental shape of the modern political imaginary characterized by such aspects as the turn-to-the-subject, the compartmentalization of life (perhaps most clearly displayed in the private-public divide), the pre-eminence of the nation-state, and the omnivorous appetite of the market. The political duty of the Christian essentially boils down to choosing the right side in the continuing societal struggles for control over the processes of social change. Although academic practitioners of “political theology” have tended to lean in a leftward direction, the same set of assumptions

3 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 9.

4 *Ibid.*, 9.

5 Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 11-16, 375-78.

undergirds the political activism of Christians on the right.⁶ This accommodation to the strictures of the modern liberal-democratic market-state also seems to characterize what is commonly associated with political preaching. Within this framework, which seems to have a firm grasp on the public imagination, preaching is political when it addresses one of the predominant issues of contention between the major political parties.⁷ At election time, such “political preaching” may even venture to endorse a particular candidate.⁸ However, these efforts at “political preaching,” captured as they are by the imagination of the modern liberal market-state, often result in nothing more than feeble attempts to keep pace with the progressive status quo, on the one hand, or conservative reactionary responses, on the other.⁹ While the left-leaning and rightward-tending voices which sound forth from pulpits today propose different solutions, both groups presume that the fundamental question to be addressed is “what is the relationship between Christianity and politics?” However, as Hauerwas has observed, “that way of putting the matter – that is, ‘What is the relationship between Christianity and politics?’ – is to have failed

6 For this reason, Hauerwas insists that from Rauschenbusch to Niebuhr to Falwell the subject of Christian ethics in America has always been America. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (1988, reprint Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 171-90. As Hauerwas succinctly frames the matter elsewhere, “The religious right and the religious left both want to highjack the church for their own interests” (*Disrupting Time*, 77).

7 Admittedly, this judgement is based on my own personal perception of the current state of affairs. However, the following sampling of articles takes for granted the assumptions about “political preaching” outlined above: William J Carl III, “Politics and Preaching,” *Living Pulpit* 5, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 38-39; Robert R. LaRochelle, “Faithful Preaching—Prophetic or Political?,” *Living Pulpit (Online)* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 11-12; Henry Pietersma, “Political Preaching,” *Reformed Journal* 22, no. 7 (September 1, 1972): 6-7; David J. Lose, “Politics in the Pulpit? Yes! Because God Loves the World,” *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (March 1, 2003): 207, 209; Gracia Grindal, “Politics in the Pulpit? No! A Sermon Must Do More,” *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (March 1, 2003): 206, 208.

8 See, for example, Tamara Audi, “Preaching Politics, Pastors Deny Ban,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 5, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/preaching-politics-pastors-defy-ban-1412558726>.

9 Echoing John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas maintains that “appeals to Jesus as ‘political’ too often are only slogans that fail to indicate the *kind* of politics Jesus incarnated.” Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 171.

to account for the political reality of the church.”¹⁰

Christians do not need to find a way to go public with their faith (as the title of one popular evangelism manual suggests),¹¹ for the church simply *is* the eschatological public of the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus.¹² Echoing one of his famous ecclesial affirmations, “the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic,”¹³ Hauerwas explains in the introduction to his most recent collection of sermons how he attempts in his preaching to help his hearers see that “the Gospel does not *have* political implications because the Gospel *is* a politics.”¹⁴ For Hauerwas, the primary political calling of Christians is to be the church and “the church’s first political task is to worship the true God truly.”¹⁵ This conception of the church as a *polis* ordered to the worship of the Triune God is at the heart of what Rasmusson has identified as Hauerwas’s “theological politics” and runs against the grain of what is normally identified as “the political” in modernity.¹⁶ Whereas “political theology” endeavours to encourage Christians to participate in the political struggle for control of the apparatuses of the nation-state, Hauerwas “sees the church, the called people of God, as the primary locus of a new politics . . . determined by the new reality of the kingdom of God as seen in the life and destiny of Jesus.”¹⁷ This results not only in the shifting of the primary locus of politics away from the nation-state to the church in Hau-

10 Hauerwas, *Work of Theology*, 173.

11 William Carr Peel and Walter L. Larimore, *Going Public with Your Faith: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

12 This way of formulating the matter is indebted to Reinhard Hütter, “The Church as Public: Doctrine, Practice and the Holy Spirit,” in *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 19-42. To speak, with Hütter, of the church as a “public” does not, in my judgment, necessarily entail taking onboard his constructive pneumatological-ecclesiological project in its entirety.

13 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99.

14 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xix.

15 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 182.

16 Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 73.

17 Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis*, 187-88.

erwas's thought, but also in a re-conception of the nature of politics itself.¹⁸ Politics, for Hauerwas, is not about seizing the levers of power or pulling the strings behind the scenes on Parliament Hill. Rather, politics is "about the conversation necessary for a people across time to discover goods that they have in common."¹⁹ Because this understanding of politics transcends the self-understanding of modern liberal political arrangements, Hauerwas is sometimes understood as being apolitical, or, more provocatively, is accused of being "a sectarian, fideistic, tribalist."²⁰ However, this charge is only plausible if "it is assumed that the secular state has the right to determine what will and will not count as political."²¹ Rather than reading Hauer-

18 Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis*, 188.

19 Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 6.

20 This charge was first introduced by Hauerwas's teacher James Gustafson in "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985): 83-94. The succinct formulation "sectarian, fideistic, tribalist" appears to be Hauerwas's own summary of Gustafson's charges. Hauerwas has ably defended himself against these charges in many places, including: *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 90-110; *Christian Existence Today*, 1-21; *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 1-10; *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), 23-34. Luke Bretherton has introduced a helpful distinction between "liberal constitutional orders," which attempt to guarantee a basic set of freedoms for their citizens, and "liberalism as a form of politics," which "represents the attempt to eliminate frailty, historical contingency, and creatureliness from political life." Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 49. While Hauerwas himself has attempted to draw a similar distinction between truly democratic practice and liberal political theory, his sometimes cavalier-sounding, blanket dismissals of modern liberal democratic societies have perhaps opened the door for those looking to pin the charge of sectarianism upon his work. For examples of where Hauerwas draws a crucial distinction between liberal political theory and democratic process, see his early essay, "Politics, Vision and the Common Good," in *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 222-40; his more recent collaboration with the radical democratic theorist and activist Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008); and the discussion in his most recent work, *Work of Theology*, 179-86.

21 Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 12.

was as providing a sectarian account of the church, John Thomson has intriguingly argued that Hauerwas's ecclesiology is perhaps best understood as "a distinctively Christian theology of liberation from the Enlightenment project."²² Hauerwas's theology, I believe, also has great emancipatory potential for preachers. In what follows I will explore the potential that Hauerwas's theological politics of preaching has for liberating the practice of preaching from the gravitational pull of the modern subject, from the tyranny of techniques and methods, and from the "Babylonian captivity" of theology and the Bible by the Enlightenment University.²³ This threefold division is intended to serve a heuristic purpose, but does not actually represent three independent or isolated themes within Hauerwas's theological politics of preaching. As a result, there will be a certain amount of conceptual overlap in the discussion of the three strands which follows.

1. Escaping the Gravitational Pull of the Modern Subject

Preaching is intended to be an intensely theological activity. After all, as Hauerwas has affirmed, "the subject of any sermon is the Triune God."²⁴ However, as an act of communication that involves one human subject speaking to other human subjects, preaching always runs the risk of devolving into mere anthropology. The danger comes from both sides. On the one hand, congregants who come expecting to "be fed" by a sermon relevant to their needs place tremendous pressure upon the preacher to cater to their discriminating tastes as religious consumers. On the other, the preacher can be tempted to make their own religious subjectivity the center of the sermon. These two dangers are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes they can even be seen to be operating in tandem, as when a preacher

22 Thomson, *Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 216.

23 The theme of the "Babylonian captivity" of theology and the Bible is prevalent throughout Hauerwas's corpus, however the actual phrase "Babylonian captivity" is found in Stanley Hauerwas, "The Testament of Friends," *Christian Century* 107, no. 7 (February 28, 1990): 215. In an endorsement appearing on the back cover of *The Bible and the University*, Hauerwas praises the work for "reclaiming the Bible from its Babylonian captivity to narrow academic standards." David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans, eds., *The Bible and the University*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (2007; repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

24 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxiii.

begins a sermon by making a sentimental appeal to some personal anecdote intended to represent some supposedly common experience.²⁵

While the dangers of making preaching about the human speaker and listeners are surely perennial, they are perhaps amplified in the time known as modernity. It is possible to construe the modern project as humanity's attempt to put itself in the place of God.²⁶ In order to sustain the myth that we are our own gods, a new narrative was needed to mask the radical contingency of our existence. The god-like view from everywhere and nowhere which characterizes the modern subject represents the profound loss of memory and place, and hence of story. Modernity, in Hauerwas's memorable formulation, "names the attempt to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they chose when they had no story."²⁷ Hauerwas continues, "This is called 'freedom,' and it is assumed such an account of freedom is necessary to sustain an account of morality that cannot acknowledge that we live by gift."²⁸

The reality that human beings are creatures, and fallen ones at that, does not sit well with people who have been led to believe that they are self-constituting choosers. From a theological perspective, the freedom to be left to our own devices, so cherished by modern liberal societies, is not freedom at all, but is, in fact, to be held in slavery to sin. "Freedom," Hauerwas asserts, "lies not in creating our lives, but learning to recognize our lives as gift."²⁹ Hauerwas's use of the word "learn" in the previous sentence is telling. It indicates that

25 "As soon as a preacher begins a sermon with 'I cannot believe what my seven-year-old daughter recently said,' you can quit listening. The subject of the sermon, no matter what else is said, will not direct attention to the witness of the scriptures to God." Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxiv.

26 Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart suggest that, "The whole scientific-technological project of the modern age has been a kind of new creation, a remaking of the world, as though humans had the creative power of God and the creative wisdom of God." *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 38-39.

27 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 148.

28 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 148.

29 Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 198.

the true freedom of being a creature, while natural, is not inherent to the fallen human being. The restoration of this freedom is dependent upon the initiative of the God who has acted apart from us, yet for us, in electing Israel as his peculiar people, and in the fullness of time revealing himself through the reconciling life, death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus, into whose body Gentiles are now being grafted through the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching, therefore, Hauerwas asserts, “is a constant reminder that the church is constituted by people who have learned that they have not chosen God. Rather, we are a people who have been chosen by God which, at the very least, means we discover that we are a people constituted by a story that we have not chosen.”³⁰ Not only do Christians find themselves constituted by a story they have not chosen, it is a story that cannot be known apart from the telling. The Triune God, who reveals himself in his saving activity amidst the contingencies of history, transcends the creation and is not simply available to empirical verification.³¹ If we are to learn to recognize our lives as gifts, we must be told the story of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.³² In a way that grates against modern liberal sensibilities, we must insist that preaching is necessary for our salvation.³³

Preaching, for Hauerwas, is an authoritative practice of the church. “Through the proclamation of the Gospel,” he insists, “the church stands joyfully under the authority of the Word.”³⁴ Because preaching is an authoritative practice of the whole church it can never be about the preacher spouting his or her opinions, rather the task of preaching is bound to the exposition of Scripture.³⁵ More particularly, Hauerwas asserts, the preacher is bound to the particular texts of

30 Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 238.

31 Hauerwas forcefully advanced this argument in his 2001 Gifford Lectures. See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).

32 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 239.

33 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 199.

34 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 237.

35 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 237; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 12.

Scripture assigned in the church's lectionary.³⁶ Hauerwas's construal of preaching as an authoritative practice of the church illumines his earlier-mentioned assertion that "Preaching is the most political of tasks."³⁷ Modern liberal societies with their conflation of the exercise of authority with authoritarianism and their endless deferral on the question of truth, lack the resources for genuine political deliberation concerning the common good. In this context, the very act of preaching is a prophetic activity and an integral part of the church's political witness because it exemplifies the exercise of truthful political authority that the world could not otherwise imagine.³⁸

The great Scottish Congregationalist theologian, P.T. Forsyth, commenting on the future of the church in the modern world, once observed that "the church can never part with the tone of authority, nor with the claim that, however it may be defined, the authority of its message is supreme."³⁹ When the authoritative character of the practice of preaching is lost, the preacher becomes especially susceptible to the whims and preferences of hearers who have been formed by stories other than the Gospel. John Wright believes that that this is exactly the place that preaching has arrived at in the contemporary North American church. Wright's diagnosis of the current state of the preaching enterprise within the church bears repeating:

Even the word preaching has dropped out of fashion. Preaching represents an undesirable vestige of stuffy churchliness. Preachers no longer preach or proclaim the

36 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 237. While I appreciate Hauerwas's concern in appealing to the lectionary as a way of freeing the activity of preaching from the subjectivity of the preacher and each preacher's 'canon within a canon,' I wonder whether there is not a place within the pastoral office and its responsibility for the 'cure of souls' for the Spirit-led discernment of particular biblical texts for preaching at particular times or seasons in the life of a congregation. Such discernment need not be an individualistic endeavor. It could easily involve the preacher entering into a process of discernment with other leaders of the congregation.

37 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 7.

38 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 237; Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xx.

39 P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1907), 3-5, 41-50, quoted in Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 100.

gospel. Instead, they share or, better, engage in a teaching ministry. Printed outlines with fill-in-the-blanks ensure that those who gather follow the message and take helpful tips home. Congregations demand relevance, insight into life as lived by the mainstream of North American culture. Preachers constantly face the specter of two unpardonable sins, sins beyond the realm of atonement: not meeting the people's needs and, even worse, boring them.⁴⁰

Hauerwas employs a variety of terms to describe the strategies employed by preachers in the attempt to avoid committing these unpardonable sins.⁴¹ The three most prominent terms appear to be translation,⁴² explanation,⁴³ and apologetics⁴⁴. Although there are subtle differences in the way Hauerwas utilizes these three terms, they all presume a systematic commitment to an anthropological starting point that places the living Lord before the tribunal of human experience and understanding, in the very act denying the Lordship of Christ. In its quest for relevance, such preaching cannot help but reinforce the status quo.⁴⁵ Preaching that is bound to relevance stands in captivity to the human subject.⁴⁶ As a result, it overlooks the human

40 John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 16.

41 Although being boring may, in fact, be a sin in Hauerwas's estimation. Consider, for example, Hauerwas's admission, "I confess that I would rather be wrong than 'painfully boring'" (*With the Grain of the Universe*, 147). In a similar vein, Hauerwas chastises the church for making the best story in the world "with the aid of much theory, boring as hell" (*Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 199).

42 William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers: Evangelism in Today's World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 7-8; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 14-15.

43 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ*, 15; Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 227-31; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 14-15; Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii-xviii, xxi-xxv.

44 Willimon and Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, 9-10; Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xiii-xvii.

45 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 193; Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xx-xi.

46 Dietrich Bonhoeffer made a similar observation in the midst of the German Church Struggle. Addressing a group of pastors on the theme of the interpretation of the New Testament, Bonhoeffer observed, "But where the question of rele-

subject's desperate need to be converted by the Gospel that is announced through preaching that is truly free as a result of its captivity to the Word. Under Hauerwas's influence, those of us who are called to preach, must recognize that "our task is not to make the Gospel intelligible in light of the world we live in. Rather, our task is to allow the text to reveal how the world we live in has been transformed through this agent of the new creation [namely, Jesus]."⁴⁷ Preaching then, for Hauerwas, is not a matter of apologetics but evangelization.⁴⁸ Preaching confronts the preacher and hearers alike with the reality of the Lord who rules from the cross and graciously summons all to bring every aspect of their lives under the dominion of his life-giving reign. Preaching at its most fundamental level has to do with truth. Hauerwas asserts that "To speak the truth does not require translation but rather a confidence that what we say when we say God was in Christ makes a difference for how our lives and the world is rightly understood."⁴⁹

One of the most succinct and helpful definitions of the Gospel was provided by Martin Luther when he remarked, "The gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord."⁵⁰ Expanding upon Luther's definition, because the Gospel is the story of David's son, it is bounded by the contingencies and particularities surrounding the life of the first century Palestinian Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. However, since this man is

vance becomes the *theme of theology*, we can be certain that the cause has already been betrayed and sold out." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Interpretation of the New Testament (August 23, 1935)," in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995), 151.

47 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 135. This quote appears in a passage where Hauerwas is discussing the interpretation of biblical texts in the context of writing his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. However, due to Hauerwas's insistence that preaching is the primary locus for biblical interpretation, a topic which will be addressed later in this essay, it seems quite appropriate to apply this quote to the task of preaching.

48 Willimon and Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, 10.

49 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

50 Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction of What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 105.

also God's Son, the story of the Gospel has the capacity to encompass the entire universe. In this vein, Hauerwas understands preaching to involve the re-narration of the world and our lives in light of the revelation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah Jesus. "Preaching," Hauerwas writes, "is the gift God has given the church so that our lives can be located within God's life by having our existence storied by the Gospel."⁵¹ This understanding of the preaching task implies that the preacher must not only exegete Scripture, but must also exegete the congregation and the surrounding culture in the light of Scripture. Thus, while Hauerwas strenuously objects to the employment of an apologetic methodology or the adoption of an apologetic posture on the part of the preacher, he does allow a place for "ad hoc apologetics."⁵² That is, a preacher may occasionally and non-systematically engage in intellectual skirmishes with opposing views or ideas for the sake of indicating that the world narrated in Scripture is the same world as the one we inhabit. Although Hauerwas rejects an anthropocentric approach to preaching that caters to the "felt needs" of the hearers, he does nonetheless understand a good sermon to be one in which listeners find themselves thinking, "That rings true."⁵³ When, through the act of proclamation, listeners find themselves inscribed into the story of God, preaching has become more than simply the telling of the story. Preaching is now the continuation of the story itself, as here "the teller and the tale become one."⁵⁴

Hauerwas is often criticized, as he puts it, "about what appears to be the absence of the Holy Spirit in my work."⁵⁵ However, Hau-

51 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

52 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxx. Hauerwas appropriates the term "ad hoc apologetics" from Hans Frei's description of Karl Barth's work. Hans W Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 161.

53 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 17.

54 *Ibid.*, 47.

55 Hauerwas, *Work of Theology*, 32. Some of the more sympathetic criticisms along these lines can be found in Rasmusson, *Church as Polis*, 179; Thomson, *Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 2003, 214-15; Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 97-98; Joseph L. Mangina, "Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (January 1, 1999): 292. For a less sympathetic critique, see Nicholas M Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very)*

erwas's description of preaching as an unapologetic enterprise, which becomes the occasion for hearers to locate their lives "within God's life by having our existence storied by the Gospel," suggests the presence of substantial pneumatological convictions.⁵⁶ After all, as the Fathers clearly recognized, only one who is God, namely the Holy Spirit, is capable of making us participants in God's own life.⁵⁷ Furthermore, to preach in the unapologetic fashion advocated for by Hauerwas requires "that those who preach trust that God is going to show up when the Word is rightly proclaimed."⁵⁸ The refusal to speak according to the world's self-understanding through recourse to apologetics, explanation, and translation, means that the preacher is dependent upon the Holy Spirit to create ears capable of hearing the Word. Although Hauerwas does suggest that sermons may be helpfully thought of as arguments, they are always arguments from faith for faith and never attempts to argue someone into faith.⁵⁹ In this way, it is possible to say that Hauerwas's understanding of preaching resonates with the Reformers emphasis upon the Spirit creating faith through the Word. Preaching is a pneumatic event for Hauerwas, although even here his pneumatology remains largely implicit. We are granted occasional glimpses of Hauerwas's operative pneumatology when he ventures such statements as "God must be 'really present' in the sermon just as God is present in the body and blood of the Eucharist."⁶⁰ Even more recently, Hauerwas has noted, "the Holy Spirit is rightly understood to be the animating principle of the central practices that make the church the church; that is, it is the Spirit that makes preaching, baptism and Eucharist more than just another way of communication, initiation, of sharing a meal."⁶¹

Critical Introduction (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), esp. 122-26.

56 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

57 This line of argumentation is advanced by both Athanasius in his *Letters to Serapion* and Basil of Caesarea in *On the Holy Spirit*.

58 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxv.

59 Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

60 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 19.

61 Hauerwas, *Work of Theology*, 39.

2. Freedom from the Tyranny of Techniques and Methods

In his influential book, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre advances the argument that the modern age has spawned in the West “a specifically emotivist culture.”⁶² Emotivism is dependent upon the modern creation of the fact-value distinction and relegates judgements surrounding beauty, truth, and goodness to the realm of personal preference.⁶³ Since, in this type of culture, questions of ends are a matter of values and therefore ultimately irresolvable, effectiveness becomes the reigning criteria for vindicating decisions and authority.⁶⁴ This is particularly evident in two of the *characters* MacIntyre puts forward as moral representatives of emotivist culture: “the Manager” and “the Therapist.”⁶⁵ In their own contexts, both the Manager and Therapist represent the social content of emotivism, namely, “the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations.”⁶⁶ Since neither character is equipped or expected to engage in moral debate, both accept the ends as given and become masters of the techniques required to achieve their pre-determined ends.⁶⁷ The extent to which emotivist culture has infiltrated the church in North America is evident in the way that the pastoral calling today is often understood in managerial and therapeutic terms.⁶⁸ When preaching is looked upon as an extension of the pastoral calling understood in managerial or therapeutic terms, homiletics becomes nothing more than a matter of method and technique.

62 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 22.

63 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11-22.

64 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 25-26.

65 The third character MacIntyre introduces in *After Virtue* is “the Rich Aesthete.”

66 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 23.

67 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 30.

68 William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 59-63. Eugene Peterson has been particularly concerned with rescuing the pastoral calling in North America from this fate. His memoir stands as his crowning literary achievement and a must-read for all pastors. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

An autobiographical admission in the introduction to *Disrupting Time* suggests how Hauerwas's conception of preaching departs from that of emotivist culture. Hauerwas writes, "I cannot pretend that I have any thing so grand as a homiletical strategy or theory. I hope, however, that I have developed habits, theological habits, that shape how I preach."⁶⁹ For our purposes, the important thing to observe in this quotation is how Hauerwas, with respect to preaching, prefers to think in terms of the habits of the preacher as opposed to theories or strategies. On the surface this could suggest that, for Hauerwas, the type of person the preacher is far outweighs whatever rhetorical tricks she happens to have in her homiletical toolbox. This inference would not be wrong, but it would be incomplete, as it is still too individualistic an account. For Hauerwas character is always dependent upon narrative and narrative is always carried by a community as it is embodied in the community's distinctive practices. Drawing upon the work of MacIntyre, Hauerwas suggests that preaching is rightly understood as an ecclesial practice.⁷⁰ A practice, according to MacIntyre, is, "any coherent and complex form of socially established, co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result the human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and good involved are systematically extended."⁷¹ Understanding preaching as a practice

69 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 7. Despite his claims to have no homiletical strategy, Hauerwas does seem to employ a rhetoric resembling John Wright's "homiletic of turning" in a significant number of his sermons. A homiletic of turning, according to Wright, "involves (1) acknowledgment of the contemporary horizon of a congregation as they have been formed by the culture, (2) an anchor to move horizontally around the contemporary horizon, and (3) heading in the new direction toward the summit. The sermon must move into the point of turning, the tragic moment, but it cannot stay there. The sermon must point beyond the tragic loss of previous narratives by traversing them, pointing the congregation into the wonderful good news of living amid God's story." Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 87. Hauerwas offers a positive appraisal of Wright's book in *Working with Words*, 99n12.

70 This conviction underlies much of Hauerwas's writing on the theme of preaching, however it is most explicitly articulated in a "sermonic illustration" entitled "Practice Preaching" in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 235-40.

71 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 236, quoting MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

entails the recognition that “preaching is not what a preacher does, but rather it is the activity of the whole community.”⁷² This places the practice of preaching within what could be considered to be a vicious—or perhaps better in this case to say virtuous—moral circle. Preaching requires hearers who have been schooled in the truth of the Gospel. On the other hand, preaching is one of primary means through which such formation occurs. Elaborating on the necessity for well-formed hearers, Hauerwas remarks, “We must remember that as important as what and how the preacher says what he or she has to say are the habits that constitute the ‘ears’ that will hear what is said. In a decisive sense, preaching can be only as good as those ears make possible.”⁷³ If Hauerwas is correct, then it is important to observe that preaching can never be separated from the entire web of practices which constitute the linguistic community called the church. Preaching does not occur in a vacuum, “rather it is surrounded by and sustained within the whole liturgy of the church.”⁷⁴ Word and sacrament belong together.⁷⁵ Through the sustained and continuing worship of God that takes place within the practices of the church, the bodies of worshippers are habituated to the language of faith.⁷⁶

Habituation to the language of faith is for Hauerwas simply another way of saying sanctification. Hauerwas argues, “To learn to be a Christian, to learn the discipline of faith, is not just similar to learning another language. It *is* learning another language.”⁷⁷ While the sermon never stands alone, it does occupy a central place in forming

Nicholas Healy has drawn attention to how MacIntyre’s theologically vacuous definition of practice is not sufficient to adequately describe the full theological reality of church practices. Healy, Hauerwas, 104-9. With respect to the practice of preaching, as was seen towards the end of the previous section of this essay, Hauerwas does hold theological convictions which could be employed to modify MacIntyre’s definition.

72 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 237.

73 Willimon and Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, 9.

74 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 240.

75 Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 240; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 24.

76 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 87.

77 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 87.

Christians in the language of faith. The sermon, Hauerwas insists, “is our fundamental speech act as Christians through which we learn the grammar of the faith.”⁷⁸ Far from manipulating individuals through the clever employment of techniques, which is actually the denial of politics, the sermon is an exercise in the politics of speech. Through the inculcation of the language of faith, Christians are empowered to see the world truly and discover the goods they hold in common. Reflecting the influence of Wittgenstein, Hauerwas continually emphasizes that “You can only act in a world you can see, and you can only see by learning to say.”⁷⁹ Words make our world; which should not be surprising to a people who confess that both words and the world are created by the Word.⁸⁰ As proclaimers of the Word, preachers are called to the task of “word care.”⁸¹ The words used by preachers must be carefully weighed and the relationship between the words must be continually tested in the light of the Gospel because the preacher is a “teacher of language.”⁸² A poorly crafted sermon, wherever its particular short-comings may lie, is a political failure because it deprives the congregation of its most fundamental resource for sustaining Christian speech.

Hauerwas’s understanding of preaching as practice points the way towards the recovery of eloquence as a homiletical virtue. It seems like much of what passes for public speech today can be characterized as banal, merely functional, or even manipulative or intentionally deceptive. Perhaps Hauerwas is right to suggest that “one of the characteristics of the culture currently described as democratic is its loss of elegant speech.”⁸³ In the face of the inelegant speech which characterizes contemporary society, preachers must seek to reclaim a way of speaking that is simultaneously beautiful, true, and good.

78 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 93.

79 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 178. See also Hauerwas, *Hauerwas Reader*, 611; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 40-41.

80 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 41.

81 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 18.

82 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 86.

83 Hauerwas, *Work of Theology*, 186.

Elegant preaching says no more than needs to be said and reserves a place for awe, wonder, and mystery.⁸⁴ Such eloquence ultimately emerges from prayer, which is “the heart of Christian speech.”⁸⁵ In a world of inelegant speech and hence distorted vision, well-formed sermons, Hauerwas suggests, “may turn out to be the most important contribution Christians can make to a politics that has some ambition to be truthful.”⁸⁶

Hauerwas’s conception of preaching as practice presents a compelling alternative to emotivist culture’s reduction of preaching to method or technique. However, it also introduces significant challenges related to the vicious or virtuous circle that was previously highlighted. Preaching as practice requires well-formed preachers and listeners, but what if the church of late-modernity in North America lacks this formation? What if many of our congregations are now unable to recognize a good sermon when they hear one? What if many pastors have given up theologically-formed discourse for pragmatic strategies and techniques and are now unable to preach in any other way? In several places, Hauerwas suggests that our loss of distinctive Christian habits and our confusion of the Christian story with other narratives have “made it impossible for us to rightly be proclaimers and hearers of the Word.”⁸⁷ This appears to be a dire situation. However, the fact that God has allowed the church to recognize its plight suggests that all may not yet be lost. Contemporary North American Christians must cling to the hope that the vicious or virtuous circle can be broken open by the Holy Spirit speaking afresh to the church through preachers who dare to proclaim the Word of God.

3. Ending the Babylonian Captivity of the Bible and Theology to the Enlightenment University

Near the beginning of *Unleashing the Scripture*, which may very well be his most controversial book, Hauerwas states that “one of the

84 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 88.

85 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 93.

86 Hauerwas, *Work of Theology*, 186.

87 Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 43. Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 43.

purposes of this book is to free those who preach and those who hear from thinking that we must rely on the latest biblical study if we are to proclaim the gospel.”⁸⁸ Theology and the Bible, according to Hauerwas’s reading of the situation, have been taken prisoner and led into exile in the academy. Theologians now write primarily for other theologians and Scripture has become an afterthought for the theological enterprise.⁸⁹ Stemming from the theologians’ neglect of Scripture, the study of the Bible has come under “the hegemony of the historical-critical method.”⁹⁰ The strange result of this development, which would have been unimaginable prior to the Enlightenment, is that theology and exegesis are now thought of as two separate entities.⁹¹

Both the Bible and the practice of theology must be liberated from their academic captivity. However, the path to this liberation does not involve the solitary individual heroically taking up the Bible and reading Scripture for him or herself—à la fundamentalism.⁹² Hauerwas helpfully explains why this is the case in a later essay reflecting upon *Unleashing the Scripture*:

Fundamentalism and historical criticism are but two sides of the same coin—that is they are both developments of the Protestant stress on sola scriptura that was transformed into sola text by the printing press. These developments were then given ideological formation through the development of democratic social orders, which created something called the individual citizen that presumed the ability to read the Bible without spir-

88 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 7.

89 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 7-8.

90 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 8.

91 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 101.

92 In one of his most outrageous claims, Hauerwas asserts that, “No task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America” (*Unleashing the Scripture*, 15). Taken at face-value, this statement is very difficult to defend. See, for example, Healy’s criticisms in Hauerwas, 60-62. However, Hauerwas’s own recourse to Flannery O’Connor – “to hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind, you draw large and startling figures” – in the same essay suggests how his own assertion may best be read (*Unleashing the Scripture*, 9).

itual formation or moral guidance. As a result the Bible was separated from the community necessary for it to be read as the word of God—that is, the church.⁹³

All readings are necessarily political, but only within the political community of the church can the Bible be read as Holy Scripture. In fact, the very existence of a canon consisting of these particular books bound together in a single volume is a reflection of a prior ecclesial political judgement.⁹⁴ Attempts to remove the Bible from its native interpretive context within the web of practices which constitute the church in the name of a supposedly more objective interpretation of the text makes the false assumption that the “text exists prior to such interpretive strategies.”⁹⁵ Rather than being apolitical, the “common-sense” reading of fundamentalists and the pursuit of hermeneutical theories by historical-critical scholars are both fuelled by the political assumptions of modern liberal democratic societies.⁹⁶ However, their readings are particularly pernicious on account of the way they disguise their political character, sometimes even from the interpreters themselves.⁹⁷ Although the biblical critic and the fundamentalist serve different constituencies, they both in Hauerwas’s estimation, “assume an objectivity of the text in order to make the Bible available to anyone, and that ‘anyone’ is assumed to be the citizen of democratic polities.”⁹⁸

Hauerwas, however, is quite insistent that the Bible is not accessible to anyone, nor does it have ‘a meaning.’ Beginning with the former, Hauerwas emphatically asserts, “*The Bible is not and should not be accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part*

93 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 96.

94 Robert W. Jenson, “Scripture’s Authority in the Church,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27-28.

95 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 20.

96 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 16, 35; Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 95n5.

97 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 16.

98 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36.

of God's people."⁹⁹ The logic of this claim is most clearly demonstrated in a memorable and entertaining 'sermonic exhibit' entitled, "The Insufficiency of Scripture: Why Discipleship is Required."¹⁰⁰ Hauerwas leans heavily upon a reading of the road to Emmaus story (Luke 24) to advance his argument. While it is easy for us to look down upon the travellers as being exceptionally dull in failing to recognize the risen Lord, Hauerwas argues this would be a mistake. We cannot presume that Jesus would be instantly recognizable to us because "resurrection is the reconfiguration of all we know, have known, and will know."¹⁰¹ The person of the risen Lord Jesus Christ explodes all of our operational categories. It is only as Jesus opens the Scriptures to the travellers and ultimately, takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread at the table that their eyes are opened to see him. This suggests that "knowing the Scripture does little good unless we know it as part of a people constituted by the practices of a resurrected Lord," because "we do not possess in ourselves what we need to recognize Jesus as the resurrected Lord because such recognition depends upon training by that very Lord."¹⁰² A bare text, even that of the Bible, can be no substitute for participation in the life of the community of disciples who are made participants in the life of Christ through feasting at his table.¹⁰³

Hauerwas's vociferous objections to discovering 'the meaning' of Scripture are rooted in his conflict with modern biblical exegesis, which, "in keeping with modern rationality itself, has tended to see Scripture as an object with a single, objectively determined meaning."¹⁰⁴ It becomes immediately apparent that this is a mistaken notion when one considers the practice of preaching. If there was an objective meaning in the text waiting to be discovered, then the discovery of that meaning would render any further reading

99 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 9.

100 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 47-62.

101 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 52.

102 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 49, 54.

103 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 60-61.

104 William Stacy Johnson, "Reading the Scriptures Faithfully in a Postmodern Age," in *Art of Reading Scripture*, 118-19.

redundant. Yet, “the Church is charged week after week to practice preaching,” returning year after year to the same texts.¹⁰⁵ Introducing his own sermons in *Unleashing the Scripture*, Hauerwas observes, “I make no claims to be interpreting the Scripture in order to get at the ‘real meaning.’ The ‘meaning’ is that use to which I put these texts for the upbuilding of the Church.”¹⁰⁶ While provocative, Hauerwas fails to live up to his best theological convictions, as have been explored throughout this paper, in making this assertion. Stressing that the meaning of the texts is found in the uses to which ‘I’ put the texts remains far too anthropologically and preacherly-centered. His explanation from an earlier chapter in the same work is more satisfying: “The Church returns time and time again to Scripture not because it is trying to find the Scripture’s true meaning, but because Christians believe that God has promised to speak through Scripture so that the Church will remain capable of living faithful by remembering well.”¹⁰⁷ To put it another way, for Hauerwas, Scripture and the church ‘coinhere’ within the ongoing history generated by the eschatological irruption of the Kingdom of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ Because Scripture cannot be removed from this field of living forces, both divine and human (at least not while still remaining Scripture), it can never be reduced to a single meaning, but will always have a surplus or superabundance of meaning. Even the ‘original intent’ of the author, if it could ever be determined, is relativized once a text through the process of canonization is identified as Scripture. Hauerwas writes, “There simply is no ‘real meaning’ of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians once we understand that they are no longer Paul’s letters but rather the Church’s Scripture.”¹⁰⁹

105 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 37.

106 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

107 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36.

108 The language of ‘coinherence’ to describe the relationship between Scripture and church is introduced by George Lindbeck in his essay, “Scripture, Consensus and Community,” in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 205. Hauerwas approvingly refers to Lindbeck’s notion of ‘coinherence’ in Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 100n15.

109 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 20.

In its attempt to pin down ‘the meaning’ of a passage of Scripture, the modern historical-critical method resorts to something resembling a pinning down of the biblical text upon the scientist’s bench as a specimen for dissection. In doing so, historical-criticism, with its atheistic methodology, ignores the theological reality within which the Scriptures “live and move and have their being” and at the same time commits a set of interrelated philosophical mistakes.¹¹⁰ Breaking a biblical passage down to its constitutive parts will not reveal its meaning, for words in and of themselves, simply do not have meanings. Although Hauerwas, at this point, is reflecting the influence of Wittgenstein, the Anglican divine George Herbert also once made a similar observation, wryly noting that the way “of crumbling a text into small parts, (as, the person speaking or spoken to, the subject, and object, and the like), hath neither in it sweetness, nor gravity, nor variety; since the words apart are not Scripture, but a dictionary, and may be considered alike in all the Scripture.”¹¹¹ Similarly, the notion that the academic’s desk is a sterile environment is an illusion, as language and the world are not externally related to another, but the world of the academic is already constituted by language. Finally, after the autopsy has been completed and a meaning has been extracted from the text, whatever remains of the cadaver may be safely disposed, and the researcher is free to go on their way with their hard won meaning. Talk of finding the ‘meaning’ in the text can suggest that “the ‘meaning can be abstracted from description and/or depiction.”¹¹² But for Hauerwas and the Christian tradition more generally, the church is never done with Scripture this side of the eschaton; “the reading can never come to an end.”¹¹³

110 Hauerwas discusses his philosophical objections to the historical-critical method in *Working with Words*, 102-4. For a brief exploration of the ‘atheistic’ methodology of historical-criticism, see Brian E. Daley, “Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Some Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *Art of Reading Scripture*, 70-73.

111 George Herbert, *The Temple and The Country Parson* (Boston: James B. Dow, 1842 [1652]), 296-300, 368-69, quoted in Lischer, ed., *Company of Preachers*, 67.

112 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 103n21.

113 *Ibid.*, 111.

While Hauerwas has been, perhaps rightly, criticized for presenting a rather simplistic caricature of the state of affairs in the world of biblical scholarship in *Unleashing the Scripture*, it is also important to note how his probing and reflections in this work have in many ways anticipated the burgeoning interest we see today in the theological, figural, and canonical interpretations of Scripture.¹¹⁴ As Richard Hays and others have observed, there are some questions regarding Hauerwas's hermeneutical proposal that remain. I will group these questions around the themes of historical-criticism, authorial intention, and the threat of relativism. First, there are questions surrounding the place of historical-criticism in the church's reading of Scripture. In many places, Hauerwas acknowledges that he has benefited from the historical work done by modern biblical scholars.¹¹⁵ However, these affirmations are often overshadowed by Hauerwas's fierce polemics against the methodology of historical-criticism. Historical-criticism as a methodology is clearly an inappropriate way for the church to read the Bible *as Scripture*, however Hauerwas's account would be strengthened if he offered a more substantive account of how historical-critical tools, liberated from the hegemony of the methodology of historical-criticism, could be employed by the church in service of its reading of Scripture.¹¹⁶ While this line of questioning asks how the church can use historical-critical tools, it is also possible to ask how the Triune God has used historical-criticism. While neither wishing

114 Richard Hays charges Hauerwas with presenting a "sweeping caricature that can only sound like dismissive ignorance" of the state of affairs of hermeneutical discussions in contemporary biblical studies. Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 259-60. Interestingly, while some important differences undoubtedly remain, Hays has moved much closer to Hauerwas's position with the publication of the volume he co-edited with Ellen Davis, *The Art of Reading Scripture* and with his own recent work, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).

115 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41; Stanley Hauerwas, Matthew (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 18; Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 105-111.

116 Thomson has raised a similar set of concerns in *Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 165. Hauerwas may very well reply that the concern expressed above is articulated in far too formalistic a manner and that the proof is actually to be found in the pudding of the theological readings exhibited in his recent sermons and commentary on Matthew. For something suggestive of this line of response, see Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 106-112.

to affirm historical-criticism as an appropriate methodology for an ecclesial reading of Scripture or offer a blanket endorsement of historical-criticism's variegated and often competing findings, I wonder whether there is a place to speak of historical-criticism within God's providential ordering of history as a tool that has been utilized by the Holy Spirit for the reforming and renewal of the Church.¹¹⁷

Second, related to questions surrounding historical-criticism is the question of authorial intention. In a footnote, Hauerwas articulates that he has no wish "to deny all interest in authorial intention."¹¹⁸ However, as with his approach to historical-criticism more generally, this affirmation tends to get lost amongst the polemics against both the attempt to get into 'the mind' of the author and the refusal to recognize that the writing has been placed into a new context through being taken up in the church's Scripture. Hauerwas, I think, is right to insist that Paul, even if he were to appear among us today, would not have the final word on the "real meaning" of his letters. However, to say that Paul simply becomes "one interpreter among others of his letters" seems to swing the pendulum too far in the other direction.¹¹⁹ Perhaps Augustine, who can hardly be accused of being caught up in the concerns of modern biblical exegetes can be of some assistance at this point. At one point in his 'homiletical textbook' *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine states:

Those who are engaged in searching the divine utterances must make every effort to arrive at the intention of the author through whom the Holy Spirit produced that portion of Scripture. But as I say, there is nothing risky about it, whether they do get at this, or whether they carve out another meaning from those words which does not clash

117 Perhaps, the contribution of historical-criticism could be conceived in a way analogous to the way the LORD worked out his purposes for his people through the anointing of the Persian king Cyrus. Like Hauerwas, I consider the recovery of "the Jewish character of Jesus' life and ministry" facilitated by modern historical-critical scholarship to be an irreplaceable gift to the church. See Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 105.

118 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 151n2.

119 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 20.

with right faith, and is supported by any other passage of the divine utterances. . . . How, after all, could the divine Scriptures make more abundant and generous provision, than by ensuring that the same words could be understood in several ways, which are underwritten by other no less divine testimonies.¹²⁰

Here we see Augustine both privileging and relativizing authorial intention on account of Scripture's location within the divine economy. Rather than being concerned with the psychology of the author, Augustine's qualified emphasis upon authorial intention could perhaps be understood as a reflection of the early church's concern with the integrity of the biblical texts in all of their particularity. Although the final form of the canon is a result of the church's decision, the early church did not simply hear their own voice echoed back to them in Scripture.

This brings us to the third area of concern pertaining to Hauerwas's hermeneutical remarks in *Unleashing the Scripture*, namely, the fear of rampant subjectivism and anarchic interpretation. However, this concern is more the reflection of unacknowledged modern liberal presumptions on the part of the questioner. The strategies of interpretation Hauerwas is advocating "are not those of an independent agent facing an independent autonomous text, but those of an interpretive community of which the reader is a member."¹²¹ The more pertinent question involves the integrity of the Scriptures themselves and how, in light of Hauerwas's traditioned-account of reading, the Bible does not simply become the prisoner of a community seeking to advance its own interests?¹²² There is a certain irony here, in that to the extent that Hauerwas's entire theological project is not merely descriptive, but also prescriptive, it presumes that the church is capable of hearing the Gospel afresh and reforming under the Word of God. Thomson

120 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity [On Christian Doctrine]*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. 11, bk. 3 (Hyde Park: New City Press: 1990-1997), quoted in Lischer, ed., *Company of Preachers*, 180.

121 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 21.

122 This is one of the fundamental concerns expressed by Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 263-66.

suggests that “Hauerwas might remove doubts about his respect for the integrity of the Scriptures if he was more explicit about the way texts actually indicate reading strategies.”¹²³ In an essay written in response to the criticisms of Richard Hays, Hauerwas acknowledges that although his earlier work may not have been sufficiently exegetical, he is convinced that “the way the words run matters.”¹²⁴ This is not a retreat from the argument articulated in *Unleashing the Scripture*, but an acknowledgement that such an understanding does not preclude respect for the integrity of the text. Drawing upon the work of Lewis Ayres, Hauerwas articulates his understanding of the ‘plain sense’ of Scripture:

According to Ayres, ‘the way the words run’ names the way a community has learned to read texts through training in the grammatical and figural reading habits necessary for the discovery of the plain sense of what is being read. The ‘plain sense’ is not a restrictive reading, but rather names the inexhaustible richness of the way the words run given that the words are inspired by God. To read the way the words run, therefore, is to let the words shape our imaginations in a manner that forces us to read the world scripturally rather than vice versa.¹²⁵

Hauerwas’s understanding of the use of Scripture in the church has significant implications for the contemporary practice of preaching. Critically speaking, it seemingly calls into question the “Interpreting and Applying the Bible” hermeneutics courses that are a staple of many MDiv programs preparing pastors for ministry. It also challenges the long cherished notion that sermons consist of ‘points,’ the more recent infatuation with Power Point-driven fill-in-the-blanks style sermons, and any other approach to preaching

123 Thomson, *Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 163.

124 Stanley Hauerwas, “Why ‘The Way the Words Run’ Matters: Reflections on Becoming a ‘Major Biblical Scholar,’” in *Working with Words*, 94-112.

125 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 108. Hauerwas directs readers to Ayres’s account of “the way the words run” in Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32.

which subtly, or not so subtly, suggests that there is a ‘meaning’ to be extracted from the text that is more important than the text itself.¹²⁶ “The sermon,” Hauerwas writes, “is God’s word just to the extent that the word does not replace the Word witnessed to in Scripture.”¹²⁷

More constructively, Hauerwas’s proposal points the way towards a recovery of an understanding of the importance of pastor as biblical exegete and congregational theologian, which, as we have seen, are inseparable. Pastors, long intimidated and marginalized by the academic guilds, are empowered to gird up their loins and boldly dare to open the Scriptures, for as Wright puts it, “homiletics is not the poor cousin of academic biblical interpretation.”¹²⁸ Rather, Hauerwas affirms, “preaching is the appropriate practice for biblical reading.”¹²⁹ A question may arise in the reader’s mind at this point: If preaching is the appropriate practice for biblical reading, and such reading and preaching is not about identifying and communicating ‘a meaning,’ what will the work of preaching consist of? The answer to this question, in Hauerwasian terms, is that preaching is about discovering and articulating the connections. This discovery and articulation of the connections is a multi-faceted endeavour, but it is theological through and through. “Preaching, and the theology that serves preaching,” Hauerwas writes, “is the ongoing exploration of the church to discover the connections.”¹³⁰ This exploration involves the work of discerning the connections between the richly variegated and even wildly divergent collections of stories which comprise the Bible.¹³¹ A Christological reading according to the church’s “rule of faith” is required if this disparate collection of text is to be seen to hang together.¹³² Doctrine, therefore, does not impede the reading

126 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 8-9.

127 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 231.

128 Wright, *Telling God’s Story*, 20.

129 Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 99.

130 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 232.

131 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 232. Elsewhere, Hauerwas writes, “the theologian’s task is to try to help the church maintain the connections necessary for telling the story of God’s creative and redeeming work” (*Cross-Shattered Church*, 145).

132 Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 8; Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 43; Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 106.

of Scripture, but is, in fact, of invaluable assistance to the preacher. Hauerwas writes, “What we call Christian doctrine is crucial for helping us see the connections for the story of the faith to be told in all its complexity. Learning to see the connections between the affirmation of the Trinity and the incarnation helps us better to understand not only how the story works, but also how the story works to help us see all that is as God’s creation.”¹³³ As this quote suggests, the connections to be discovered are not simply intra-textual, but also include connections with daily life in the world. The preacher doesn’t need to make these connections; they are already there waiting to be discovered. Because the contemporary congregation inhabits the same story—the story of the God of Israel revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ—the preacher does not need to valiantly struggle to ‘apply’ an archaic text. Rather, if the preacher is attentive she will discover connections between the witness of Scripture and the ongoing life of God’s story in the life of the local congregation. One of the preacher’s greatest allies in the assignment of displaying the connections is the lives of the saints.¹³⁴ The virtuoso performances of the faith by the saints, including the lesser-known saints found within every Christian community, bear witness to the intelligibility and inhabitability of the Christian story.¹³⁵ According to Hauerwas, “The lives of the saints are the hermeneutical key to Scripture.”¹³⁶ Truly biblical preaching, then, is about uncovering and articulating the connections which allow the congregation to locate themselves within the continuing story of God’s enduring love for the world in Jesus Christ. As Hauerwas puts it, “A sermon is scriptural when it inscribes a community into an ongoing Christian narrative.”¹³⁷

133 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 17.

134 The saints occupy a prominent position in Hauerwas’s own corpus of writings. Among those whose lives Hauerwas draws upon are: St. Lawrence, Thomas More, the citizens of Le Chambon, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, Clarence Jordan, and Jean Vanier, as well as largely unknown saints from local congregational settings in which Hauerwas has found himself.

135 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 78.

136 Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 305.

137 Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 42.

Conclusion

A theological politics of preaching is founded upon the recognition that “the name of the ‘politics of God’ is church.”¹³⁸ When this is kept in mind, preaching will be rightly recognized as a political activity, not because it dares to address issues deemed to be political by the prevailing socio-economic order, but because it serves the building up of the church as the body politic of Christ. Preaching therefore is intensely political because it serves to equip the people of God to truthfully see and inhabit the world. So equipped, the church bears witness to the politics of the Kingdom of God which transcends the strictures of what passes for politics in the modern nation-state. Preaching not only equips the saints to be witnesses, in its own way it also witnesses to the alternative politics of the Kingdom as an instantiation of the politics of truthful authority, the politics of speech, and the politics of interpretation. The recovery of these three aspects of the politics of preaching are essential for providing the preacher with resources to escape from the voracious appetite of modern religious consumers, the obsession with technique and method which characterizes our emotivist culture, and the captivity of the Bible to unscriptural ways of reading. While Hauerwas’s theological politics of preaching demands much from preachers and congregations alike, at its best it allows for preachers to once again be preachers, so that the church may be the church.

138 Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 142.

Missionaries in Our Own Back Yard: Missional Community as Cultural and Political Engagement in the Writings of Lesslie Newbigin

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Introduction

The previous two articles in this journal issue explore the idea that the church is a political entity. Buttrey, Eaton, and Olkovich engage the political ecclesiology of William Cavanaugh, who rejects what he calls “politically *indirect* ecclesiologies” in favour of “politically direct ecclesiologies.” Politically indirect ecclesiologies are those in which “the church influences the state only through the activities of Christian citizens, and its theology is understood to need translation into a ‘more publicly accessible form of discourse’ to influence society.”¹ In contrast, in direct ecclesiologies, such as that of Stanley Hauerwas, the church is inherently (hence directly) a political entity, although – and this is crucial – one that embodies a different politics than that of the world and thus exists as a contrast community. Robert Dean, in his contribution, unpacks Hauerwas’s conception of preaching within the context of his broader theological politics.² For Hauerwas, preaching is as an intensely political activity practiced within the church as an inherently political community (in the sense of Cavanaugh’s notion of politically *direct* ecclesiology). In this article, I want to extend this discussion by considering the church’s direct political nature from another angle: the church as missional community.

1 Buttrey, Eaton, and Olkovich, “Politicizing Religion: Cavanaugh, Lévinas and Lonergan in Dialogue.”

2 Robert Dean, “Unapologetically (A)Political: Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching.”

The term ‘missional’ has become commonplace in recent ecclesiological literature, both popular and academic, though its meaning is often vague and its history not well understood.³ While the term, as it originally developed, fits more naturally into Cavanaugh’s category of ‘direct ecclesiologies,’ many who have joined the missional bandwagon have assimilated ‘missional’ as a trendy buzzword to support their already entrenched ‘indirect ecclesiologies.’⁴ As a result, those claiming to advocate a missional model have sometimes promoted an ecclesiology that is overly pragmatic and functional.⁵ This paper examines the roots of the missional church concept in the writings of Lesslie Newbigin, in order to draw out fundamental dynamics of his missional *theo-logic* that are biblically grounded, theologically robust, and contextually engaged. While the missional church concept has continued to develop and expand, both conceptually and geographically (e.g., in the writings of the Gospel and Our Culture Network and other authors),⁶ Newbigin remains a rich resource and an im-

3 See Todd J. Billings, “What Makes a Church Missional? Freedom From Cultural Captivity Does Not Mean Freedom From Tradition,” *Christianity Today* 52, no. 3 (Mar. 2008), 56-59; and Alan Hirsch, “Defining Missional: The Word Is Everywhere, But Where Did It Come From And What Does It Really Mean?,” *Leadership*, 29 no 4 (Fall 2008): 20-22.

4 For example, ‘missional’ should not be confused with ‘emerging church,’ ‘evangelistic’ or ‘seeker-sensitive’ approaches to church, the church growth movement, the practice of formulating mission statements, an unbalanced focus on social justice, or a form of consumer ecclesiology. In fact, missional ecclesiology arose, in part, as a critique of such church models. See Billings, “What Makes a Church Missional?” and Hirsch, “Defining Missional.”

5 See Patrick Franklin, “Bonhoeffer’s Missional Ecclesiology,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 9 (2007–2008): 118-25.

6 See, for example, Lois Y. Barret, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); David E. Fitch and Geoff Holsclaw, *Prodigal Christianity: Ten Signposts into the Missional Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013); Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Intentionally In A Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006); Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Ministry for the Twenty First Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013); Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000) and *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church’s Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) and *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Roger Helland, and Len Hjal-

portant dialogue partner for this ongoing discussion.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) was educated at Cambridge University and subsequently commissioned for missionary service by the Church of Scotland in 1936.⁷ For the next four decades, Newbigin served as a missionary in India, where he sought to communicate the gospel of Christ faithfully and respectfully within a Hindu setting. He also worked passionately to unify the church, which at the time existed in various scattered groups of Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed, and Lutherans.⁸ To this end, Newbigin's work was crucial in the forming of the Church of South India (CSI—a venture that joined the aforementioned groups together), which elected him a bishop in 1947.

Newbigin returned to England in 1974 and for the next two decades he published a number of books and articles dealing with the question of how an authentic encounter between the gospel and western culture could take place. His extensive experience as a missionary in a non-western country provided him with keen insights into the way in which the gospel had become assimilated into the western worldview, so that it was read and proclaimed as determined by modern western assumptions. As Lamin Sanneh writes:

Newbigin's theological critique drew its power from his own rootedness in English life and culture and his own experience of having lived for a long time in another culture, learned its language, expressed his faith in that new medium, and subsequently reflected on its implications for other cradle Christians in the West.⁹

marson, *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Len Hjalmanson, *Text & Context: Church Planting in Canada in Post-Christendom* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft, 2013); Craig Van Gelder, ed. *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

7 George R. Hunsberger, "Biography as Missiology: The Case of Lesslie Newbigin," *Missiology* 27, no. 4 (October 1999): 523.

8 Hunsberger, "Biography as Missiology," 523.

9 Lamin Sanneh, "Lesslie Newbigin, 1909-1998: Mission to the West," *Christian*

Particularly, Newbigin noticed the seeming inability of Christians to avoid accommodating the reigning assumptions of “rational objectivity” and “personal choice.”¹⁰ Thus, Newbigin began his project of exposing the underlying presuppositions of modern western culture, many of which rested on ultimate assumptions or faith commitments that were incompatible with the biblical worldview.

Key Ideas Regarding Culture

1. The Private-Public Dichotomy

According to Newbigin, one of the fundamental characteristics of modern western culture is the separation of public and private spheres of life, and, corresponding with this, the separation of facts and values.¹¹ The public world, which includes among other things the workplace or professional setting, the legislature, and the educational system, operates with what we call facts or truth claims. There is an assumption that decisions in the public realm are made reasonably in accordance with verifiable evidence. Truth claims can be proven right or wrong, true or false, by examining the facts. It is considered inappropriate to appeal to religious values or beliefs in the public arena, because such appeals cannot be validated scientifically. Conversely, the private world of values, opinions, and beliefs is governed by personal choice or desire. Just as it is considered inappropriate to apply personal categories of values and beliefs to the public realm, so is it unacceptable to apply public categories of truth or fact to the private realm. The implication of this public-private dichotomy is that religious claims are divorced from truth claims. Consequently, it is perceived as improper or even offensive to evaluate as right or wrong, true or false, the values and religious beliefs of others. Whereas for public life the ruling principle is truth, for private life “the operative principle is pluralism.”¹² Newbigin writes:

Century 115, no. 8 (March 11, 1998): 278.

10 Hunsberger, “Biography as Missiology,” 527.

11 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 14.

12 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 17.

It is one of the key features of our culture, and one that we shall have to examine in some depth, that we make a sharp distinction between a world of what we call ‘values’ and a world of what we call ‘facts.’ In the former world we are pluralists; values are a matter of personal choice. In the latter we are not; facts are facts, whether you like them or not.¹³

Newbigin argues that this public-private dichotomy is inherited from the Enlightenment (i.e., Kant’s separation of the noumenal and phenomenal spheres),¹⁴ and is ultimately rooted in classical Greek thought, which “for all its splendid achievements, had been unable to overcome dichotomies between being and becoming, between reason and will, between the intelligible or spiritual world and the material world known by the senses.”¹⁵ In contemporary twenty-first century western societies, the public/private and facts/values split is intensified by the influence of scientism (or scientific reductionism),¹⁶ which restricts questions of truth to what can be tested by scientific (or social scientific) methods, and by the postmodern rejection of the universality of the moral law.¹⁷

13 Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 7.

14 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 25.

15 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (London: SPCK, 1991), 15-16.

16 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 14. On the problem of scientific reductionism, see also Donald M. MacKay, *Human Science and Human Dignity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 27, 48; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21-22; and Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 29-40.

17 While in a certain sense, Kant’s moral philosophy separated private values and beliefs (especially those based on particular appeals to divine revelation or church tradition) from public ethics (grounded in practical reason), his insistence on the universality of the moral law, and its universal accessibility through rational thought, ruled out moral relativism. Postmodern culture pushes the division further by rejecting as morally binding not only claims based on revelation and tradition but also those based on a (purportedly) universal moral law.

2. Abandonment of Teleology

Newbigin's second observation is that modern western culture has abandoned notions of teleology or purpose, which dominated the medieval worldview, and focuses instead on cause and effect relationships.¹⁸ Newbigin describes this feature as the "central citadel of our culture" and explains it as follows:

...the belief that the real world, the reality with which we have to do, is a world that is to be understood in terms of efficient causes and not of final causes, a world that is not governed by an intelligible purpose, and thus a world in which the answer to the question of what is good has to be left to the private opinion of each individual and cannot be included in the body of accepted facts that control public life.¹⁹

This movement away from teleology also has roots in the Enlightenment. Since efficient causes can be observed with the senses while final causes cannot, the former belongs to the phenomenal (empirical) world while the latter belongs to the noumenal (metaphysical) world. Thus, the public-private dichotomy and the abandonment of teleology go hand in hand, as both are rooted in the phenomenal-noumenal dichotomy. Newbigin also notes that the ideas of Isaac Newton (1642-1747) fueled the abandonment of teleology in Enlightenment thought. Newton viewed the universe as a machine with consistent and observable laws and mechanisms that could be discovered through human investigation.²⁰ By discovering the immediate cause of something, one could sufficiently explain it. Newbigin explains, "All causes, therefore, are adequate to the effects they produce, and all things can be in principle adequately explained by the causes that produce them."²¹

18 See also Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 9-14.

19 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 79.

20 Stanley J. Grenz, "Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology: Star Trek and the Next Generation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18, no. 4 (1994): 324.

21 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 24.

The movement away from teleology provided the modern world with a number of benefits, as Newbigin admits: “The breakthrough in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that gave birth to modern science would have been impossible without the methodological elimination of purpose from the study of physics and astronomy.”²² This is particularly true with regards to Greek teleology, which was infused with Platonic ideals and the notion of fate. For example, motion could be explained only with reference to purpose, as “a movement from the less good to the good.”²³ From a scientific standpoint, such an explanation is inadequate. Instead, we are required to identify the immediate cause that produced the effect in question, for if we are successful in finding direct causes we can then reproduce their effects. Think, for example, of the implications for medicine. Rather than attempting to diagnose and treat through speculation and superstition the ultimate purpose for a sickness (e.g., a divine curse, demonic activity, karma), which is not observable, one should attempt to isolate a direct causal link through observation and experimentation and then devise treatments that produce direct positive results.

However, Newbigin points out that a complete abandonment of teleology is both inaccurate and insufficient. For example, while one could describe a lecture solely in terms of vocal function, explaining the biomechanics of speech, muscular changes, and the physics of sound, Newbigin asserts that “no intelligent person would accept it as the explanation of what was happening.”²⁴ A meaningful explanation would have to include a discussion of the purpose or intention of the speaker to communicate something to an audience. Similarly, after listening to a great pianist one could intelligibly describe the event “simply as an example of the operation of mechanical, chemical, and electrical principles,” but surely something would be missing! Indeed, such a description could even be given “by a person who is tone-deaf and for whom a Mozart sonata is merely a jumble of noises.”²⁵ As

22 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 35.

23 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 35.

24 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 34.

25 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 57.

a final example, proper functioning of machines or tools cannot be identified, nor can we ascertain whether a device is working properly, without referring to purpose. Drawing an example from Alasdair MacInyre, Newbigin writes:

From the factual statement ‘this watch has lost only five seconds in two years,’ it is proper to move to a judgment of value: ‘this is a good watch;’ provided—and only provided—that the word ‘watch’ defines an object whose purpose is to keep time and not a collection of pieces of metal to be used for any purpose its owner as a private person may care to entertain, such as decorating the living room or throwing at the cat.²⁶

Newbigin goes on to expose a disturbing implication of the abandonment of purpose, namely, that without reference to purpose, value judgments cannot be explicated from facts.²⁷ If this is true, Newbigin argues, values are necessarily driven out of the public sphere. Each person has the freedom to define purpose in his or her own way.²⁸

Associated with the loss of teleology and the resulting mechanistic worldview is the increasing fragmentation of life.²⁹ Newbigin remarks:

Western European civilization has witnessed a sort of atomising process, in which the individual is more and more set free from his natural setting in family and neighbourhood, and becomes a sort of replaceable unit in the social machine....He is in every context a more

²⁶ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 37.

²⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 37. Without recourse to purpose, we cannot refute Hume’s argument that ‘ought’ statements cannot rationally be derived from ‘is’ statements.

²⁸ Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 24. Consequently, as a society we “display astounding brilliance in devising means for any end we desire, but we have no rational way of choosing what ends are worth desiring.”

²⁹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 29

and more anonymous and replaceable part, the perfect incarnation of the rationalist conception of man.³⁰

A typical example of this in the industrial age is the factory worker who is removed from larger questions of purpose and must focus on some particular task, which is usually menial and sometimes even dangerous. Moreover, the modern worker spends most of his or her time removed from home, family, and local community.³¹ This, in turn, has implications for gender roles, parental responsibility, and the division of labour in the home.

Even worse, dismissing questions of purpose leads to the belief that life ultimately has no meaning and is not directed toward a final goal. The Enlightenment's confidence in humanity's ability to employ reason (apart from tradition and religion) in accomplishing its own ends has led to the modern doctrine of progress, the belief that human mastery of the world will eventually conquer all forms of evil.³² Rather than placing its hope in a future heaven (or better, the new creation), humankind is deemed capable of achieving a present heaven on earth. "No longer would it be a gift of God from heaven; it would be the final triumph of the science and skill of the enlightened peoples of the earth."³³ This belief became particularly dangerous when the hopes of a heaven on earth, combined with the doctrine of progress, were vested in the modern nation-state. Such an expectation placed upon a corporate entity, which could take on its own personality and outlive its human inhabitants, "opens the way for the kind of totalitarian ideologies that use the power of the state to extinguish the rights of the living for the sake of the supposed happiness of those yet unborn."³⁴

30 Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1957), 13.

31 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 32.

32 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 32.

33 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 28.

34 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 28.

3. Captivity to Western Culture

Newbigin's third observation of the modern western world is that its understanding of Christianity and the nature and function of the church are shaped, even determined, by its own cultural assumptions. To illustrate his point he invokes Peter Berger's concept of a plausibility structure, which is defined as "a social structure of ideas and practices that create the conditions determining what beliefs are plausible within the society in question."³⁵ Currently, the reigning plausibility structure for public life in post-Christian societies is the modern scientific worldview, while for private life the reigning plausibility structure is *that there is no plausibility structure* (i.e., no guiding system to evaluate claims of values, opinion, and beliefs). Newbigin clarifies: "...not that there is no plausibility structure and thus we make our own choices. This is the ruling plausibility structure, and we make our choices within its parameters."³⁶

Typically, the church's response has been to adapt its witness of the gospel in light of these plausibility structures, attempting to show how aspects of the Christian faith (those which seem to be at odds with the culture) actually fit into the culture's worldview.³⁷ But what if it is precisely the culture's terms, conditions, and questions that are being called into question?³⁸ Is it possible to speak of a genuine encounter between the gospel and our culture?³⁹ Newbigin asks, "The Bible and the church are part of our culture. How shall a part of our culture make claims against our culture?"⁴⁰ In order to comprehend his response, and correspondingly his depiction of the church as a

35 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 10.

36 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 14.

37 One thinks, for example, of the modern seeker sensitive movement; historically, this calls to mind Schleiermacher's speeches to the modern cultured despisers of religion (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman; Westminster: John Knox, 1994).

38 Newbigin warns, "The world's questions are not the questions which lead to life. What really needs to be said is that where the Church is faithful to its Lord, there the powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask the question to which the gospel is the answer" (Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 134-35).

39 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 43.

40 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 43-44.

‘missionary congregation,’ it is necessary first to examine his theology of mission.

Newbigin’s Theology of Mission

When the Christian church engages in mission, according to Newbigin, it is not merely following a command; such a narrow view “tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel.”⁴¹ Instead, mission results from an explosion of joy in the church community, which overflows into the world.⁴² It is the manifestation of the church’s experience of the presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, it is a natural response to the supernatural activity of God. When the church has been granted a taste of God’s presence, power, grace, and reconciliatory and unifying love, it is transformed into a living testimony to the gospel. When it exhibits the selfless and sacrificial love of Christ, living not for itself but for the sake of its neighbours, it lives provocatively as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God.⁴³ When God’s presence manifests in this manner people start asking questions, and Newbigin finds it striking “that almost all the proclamations of the gospel which are described in Acts are in response to questions asked by those outside the Church.”⁴⁴

There are a number of components to Newbigin’s missiology. Crucial among them are the significance of election, the nature of conversion, the distinction between the agent and the locus of mission, and the centrality of discipleship.

41 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

42 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

43 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229. Elsewhere, Newbigin writes, “The life of the Church is a real participation in the life of the Triune God, wherein all life and all glory consist in self-giving, a *koinonia* wherein no one will ever say that aught of the things which he possesses is his own. The ultimate mystery of the Church’s being is the mystery of love, and love ‘seeketh not its own’” (*Household of God*, 129).

44 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

1. The Significance of Election

For Newbigin, election is at the core of the biblical story.⁴⁵ According to George Hunsberger, there are three reasons why election is necessary in Newbigin's missiology. First, it befits the relational and historical nature of human beings. "Human nature is by nature historical and social, each person intimately connected to each 'other.'"⁴⁶ For Newbigin, God's electing activity aims not simply to preserve a concept or system of ideals, but to create a holy community. This community is not a human-made group of individuals, in which each has chosen to associate with other like-minded people, but is the result of the gracious and sovereign act of God. As such, it is a foretaste of the world to come, in which people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9 NIV) will be gathered together in perfect love. Newbigin insists:

The thread which binds the whole Bible story together is emphatically not the history of an idea but the history of a people. Let me put this sharply by saying that, in the Bible, the people of God is at no time conceived of as a voluntary association of those who have agreed with one another in accepting and carrying out certain convictions about God. It is conceived of as something which has been constituted by the mighty act of God, an act springing from His pure grace, and preceding the first dawns of man's understanding of it and acceptance of its implications.⁴⁷

Second, election befits God's nature as relational, and more specifically personal. As a personal being, God can be known only in a manner conducive with personal knowing, which "comes by the free choice to entrust such knowledge of oneself to another."⁴⁸ Since God is personal, one cannot come to know God simply by reading

⁴⁵ Newbigin, *Household of God*, 27.

⁴⁶ George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 103.

⁴⁷ Newbigin, *Household of God*, 62.

⁴⁸ Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 103.

books, by conjecturing and philosophizing, or even by searching for and praying to God. All of these may be fruitful if—and only if—God makes Himself known, in a personal act of self-disclosure that God alone can initiate. God is not an object to be studied, quantified, and manipulated, but the divine Subject, the One who calls all things into being. For support of this relational view of God, Newbigin appeals to the doctrine of the Trinity. He notes that God is not understood as “a timeless, passionless monad beyond all human knowing, but as a trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit.”⁴⁹ Further, “this understanding is not the result of speculative thought. It has been given by revelation in the actual historical life and work of the Son.”⁵⁰

The third reason for the necessity of election is that the nature of salvation, according to God’s intention, is relational. In Newbigin’s writings, “salvation means ‘wholeness,’ which must include the restoration of social justice and interpersonal relationships.”⁵¹ Unfortunately, in the West, the way in which the gospel is often conceived and portrayed betrays a form of reductionism. For example, conservative evangelicals have sometimes been inclined to reduce the gospel to the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of the soul.⁵² Conversely, Newbigin asserts that the gospel is personal in nature, a revelation of God Himself, not “the revelation of a timeless truth, namely, that God forgives sin.”⁵³ The popular interpretation of the gospel tends also to be individualistic, emphasizing one’s relationship with God as the crux of the gospel, while considering relationships with others and action for social justice as being of secondary importance or even superfluous. Such a narrow emphasis results from an unbiblical view of humanity, in which “each human being is to be ultimately understood

49 Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 26.

50 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 26.

51 Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 103.

52 Dallas Willard calls this the “gospel of sin management” and refers to the church’s focus on this as the “great omission.” See his books *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) and *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

53 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 48.

as an independent spiritual monad....”⁵⁴ It neglects the corporate nature of both human fallenness (i.e., alienation from God and others) and redemption (i.e., restoration to wholeness).⁵⁵ If such an individualistic view of humanity were true, election would not be necessary. God would then approach each person as an isolated individual outside of a community context to reconcile that individual to Himself. However, we must recognize “...that Christianity is, in its very heart and essence, not a disembodied spirituality, but life in a visible fellowship...nothing less than the closest and most binding association of men with one another....”⁵⁶ In a relational view of salvation, election is intrinsic to the transmission of the gospel. Hunsberger refers to this as Newbigin’s “inner logic of salvation,” in which “by the very transmission of [the gospel] from one person to another, reconciliation between the partners in communication takes place.”⁵⁷

It is important to point out that Newbigin understands election primarily in light of the biblical narrative of God’s calling of Abraham (then Israel, then the church) to be a blessing to the nations. He does not begin his thinking by grounding his doctrine of election in fourth century or sixteenth century debates about the freedom of the will and the nature of grace. For Newbigin, the overarching purpose of election is to make God’s saving intentions known to all.⁵⁸ Election is the process of choosing and narrowing, of calling a particular people, to be a blessing to all and not to be exclusive beneficiaries. It is a particular act with universal intentions.⁵⁹ Moreover, “the blessing itself would be negated if it were not given and received in a way that binds

54 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 70.

55 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 140-41.

56 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 72-73.

57 Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 50.

58 A consistent theme in Newbigin’s works is that the purpose of election is for service, not for privilege (*Household of God*, 101).

59 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 31-32, 68-71. Whenever the doctrine of election has been misused, interpreted as granting exclusive benefits and privileges to the elect, it has fallen into disrepute (*Open Secret*, 17). Newbigin notes that the Old Testament prophets were constantly chastising the people of Israel for holding such a view (*Open Secret*, 32-33, 73).

each to the other.”⁶⁰ Thus, for Newbigin, election plays both a reconciliatory and a constitutive role in the creation of the church, and is “at the heart of his ecclesiology.”⁶¹

2. The Nature of Conversion

Although Newbigin is cautious of overly individualistic interpretations of the gospel, he nevertheless believes that personal conversion is crucial. He writes, “The calling of men and women to be converted, to follow Jesus, and to be part of his community is and must always be at the center of mission.”⁶² Newbigin’s understanding of conversion has three major components. First, conversion is a radical shift in a person’s mindset or understanding. It is not merely turning away from the things that a society regards as evil (these views are founded on society’s values and plausibility structures), but reveals a new vantage point, which proves “that the world’s idea of what is sin and what is righteousness is wrong (John 16:8).”⁶³ This new vantage point rests on an entirely different foundation (Christ) than that of the world. Therefore, there is no way to traverse reasonably from the old worldview to the new by means of logical deduction, because the two worldviews rest on entirely different commitments and ultimate assumptions. By way of illustration, Newbigin likens conversion to a paradigm shift (terminology borrowed from Thomas Kuhn⁶⁴) similar to the movement in physics from Newton to Einstein. He explains:

My point here is simply this: while there is a radical discontinuity in the sense that the new theory is not reached by any process of logical reasoning from the old, there is also a continuity in the sense that the old can be rationally understood from the point of view of the new.⁶⁵

60 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 71.

61 Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 50.

62 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 121.

63 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 239.

64 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press: 1970).

65 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 52.

While it is impossible to make sense of Einstein's physics within the framework of Newtonian assumptions, the newer, "more inclusive rationality" of Einstein is capable of accounting for the observations and theories of Newton.⁶⁶ Similarly, Newbigin argues that, through a radical conversion of the mind, the gospel provides a "more inclusive rationality," which can make sense of the world but cannot be deduced from the world's assumptions.⁶⁷ Ultimately this radical shift amounts to a revolutionary change in a person's loyalty or allegiance.

For the believer, Jesus is the ultimate or foundational commitment; his claim upon the believer cannot be validated by appealing to some other authority.⁶⁸ One does not reason oneself toward Christ, but from and through him one uses reason to make sense of the world. Newbigin asserts, "Indeed, the simple truth is that the resurrection cannot be accommodated in any way of understanding the world except one of which it is the starting point."⁶⁹ Yet, it is easy for the church to forget "how strange, and even repelling, the Gospel is to the ordinary common sense of the world,"⁷⁰ to forget that it is indeed "foolishness to the Greeks," and to presume that its methods and efforts can bring about the conversion of others.

How then is conversion accomplished? According to Newbigin, "it is primarily and essentially a personal event in which a human person is laid hold of by the living Lord Jesus Christ at the very center their being and turned toward him in loving trust and obedience."⁷¹ Thus, a second major component of Newbigin's understanding of conversion is that it is achieved by the revealing action of God. Accordingly, Newbigin underscores the importance of revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷² John Williams notes that "Newbigin's

66 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 53.

67 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 53.

68 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 11.

69 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 11

70 Newbigin, "Context and Conversion," *International Review of Mission* 68 (July 1979): 301.

71 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 139.

72 For Newbigin, the Holy Spirit is intimately involved as the means through which a person is laid hold of by the living Christ. He writes, "It is God who acts in the power of his Spirit, doing mighty works, creating signs of a new age, working secretly

proposals rely heavily on an understanding of biblical revelation as an interpretive key to all of experience and to the meaning and purpose of history.⁷³ However, the decisive prominence he gives to revelation does not imply a naïve stance against reason, nor does it negate the necessity of logical argument. As Newbigin asserts, “It is not (as so often said) a question of reason versus revelation. It is a question of the data upon which reason has to work.”⁷⁴ Indeed, “reason can only work with the data that it is given.”⁷⁵ It is a means, not an end; it is a tool, not a final product.

A third major component of Newbigin’s view of conversion is that it should be understood holistically, affecting the whole person. Conversion affects both soul and body. Christian mission, therefore, must be committed to caring for both spiritual and physical needs. There is no biblical warrant for endorsing a Gnostic dichotomy between body and spirit, and Christian mission is undermined whenever these are separated, and special (or even exclusive) emphasis is given to one over against the other (e.g., the soul-saving versus social justice conflict is a form of this fallacy). Moreover, conversion encompasses both belief and obedience. “It is a total change of direction, which includes both the inner reorientation of the heart and mind and the outward reorientation of conduct in all areas of life.”⁷⁶ There is “no limiting of its range, no offer of a ‘cheap grace’ which promises security without commitment to that mission for which Jesus went to the cross.”⁷⁷ It must be remembered that, in Newbigin’s understanding, conversion leading to salvation is the result of election, which is never intended merely to grant security and privileges but also a costly and sacrificial responsibility to be bearers of Christ’s

in the hearts of men and women to draw them to Christ” (*Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 118-19).

73 John Williams, “The Gospel as Public Truth: A Critical Appreciation of the Theological Programme of Lesslie Newbigin,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18, no. 4 (October 1994): 371.

74 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 24.

75 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 20.

76 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 135.

77 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 239.

blessing to others. What is given to the believer upon conversion is the call to follow Jesus, and this call “is spelled out in his teaching and example.”⁷⁸ Finally, conversion includes both personal and corporate dimensions. It “embraces within its scope the restoration of the harmony between man and God, between man and man and between man and nature...”⁷⁹ It requires committing oneself to Christ, but also to his visible fellowship on earth—his body, the church. It entails a reorientation with regards to all of God’s creation, in light of the realization that Christ has reconciled all things to himself through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:20).

3. The Agent and Locus of Mission

The agent of God’s electing, calling, and revealing is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who accomplishes the will of the Father in the hearts and actions of humanity, the Spirit who affects conversion, who creates, indwells, builds up, and sends the church into the world as a witness for Christ.⁸⁰ As the *firstfruit*, who assures the church that the full harvest is still to come (Rom 8:22-24), the Spirit is a taste and guarantee of the present-yet-coming kingdom of God. As Newbigin notes, the Spirit brings the church into an eschatological reality, making manifest the new world-to-come in the midst of the old world-that-is.⁸¹ Accordingly, mission “is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey.”⁸² Mission is first and foremost an action of the Triune God, in which the Holy Spirit carries out the will of the Father in drawing people to the Son. In fact, in his book, *The Open Secret* (which he describes as an introduction to missiology), Newbigin depicts the nature of mission in threefold trinitarian terms, as proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son, and bearing the witness of the Spirit. This trinitarian portrayal is no mere homiletic

78 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 135.

79 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 140.

80 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 99, 104.

81 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 140.

82 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 56.

device; it is foundational for and pervasive in Newbigin's theology.⁸³

An implication of this framework is that mission is not ultimately a project of the church but a work of the triune God. Success in mission does not depend upon human effort, nor can it be measured by human standards. In an age that specializes in efficient problem solving, that shows brilliance "in devising means for any end we desire," Newbigin's emphasis here is particularly relevant.⁸⁴ He urges:

It seems to me to be of great importance to insist that mission is not first of all an action of ours. It is an action of God, the Triune God—of God the Father who is ceaselessly at work in all creation and in the hearts and minds of all human beings whether they acknowledge him or not, graciously guiding history toward its true end; of God the Son who has become part of this created history in the incarnation; and of God the Holy Spirit who is given as a foretaste of the end to empower and teach the Church and to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.⁸⁵

Thus, mission must not be reduced to human efforts of designing campaigns, marketing strategies, or attractive packaging for its worship services. Primarily, it must be understood that, in mission, the church is granted the privilege and responsibility of participating in the action and life of the present, living, triune God. Mission is "the

83 As Philip W. Butin comments, "Every facet of Newbigin's theology is suffused with a personal sense of connectedness with the Triune God, whom we sense he knew by direct pastoral experience as living and active in every individual life and in every corner of the world. When Lesslie Newbigin's writings speak of the Trinity, we are in the realm, not primarily of ideas, but of the living, tripersonal God who stands above, comes within, and goes before the people of God as the purpose, pattern, and power of their shared life and mission." Philip W. Butin, "Is Jesus Still Lord? Lesslie Newbigin on the Place of Christ in Trinitarian Ecclesiology," *In Ecumenical Theology in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: Essays Presented to Geoffrey Wainwright on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. David S. Cunningham, Ralph Del Colle, and Lucas Lamadrid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 201.

84 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 24.

85 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 134-35.

whole way of living, acting, and speaking....” that results from having received the *firstfruit* of the Spirit, and is thereby characterized by the Spirit’s life-giving power and presence.⁸⁶ The church does not have the responsibility of *achieving* mission or of *actualizing* conversion (these things belong to the Spirit), nor should it take responsibility for defending its faith on terms set by the world. Rather, as a community of the triune God, the church exists to proclaim and embody the gospel of Jesus Christ in its life, actions, and words through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The church is the *locus* of mission because within it resides the Spirit, who is the *agent* of mission.⁸⁷

The fact that the church is the *locus* of mission, not its *agent*, has a further implication. Since the Holy Spirit stands over both the church and its converts, both of these are affected and experience change in the conversion process. Mission is, therefore, a two-way encounter. As experienced Christians and new converts learn to dialogue with each other, approaching the Bible together under the guidance of the Spirit, the preunderstandings, prejudices, and plausibility structures of *both* parties become manifest. This leads to a deeper understanding of the gospel, a “more inclusive rationality,” in which affirmation and negation of elements *in both cultures* takes place. Thus, a three-way dialogue occurs between church, culture, and God’s Word/Spirit such that the missionary action of the church becomes “the exegesis of the gospel.”⁸⁸ So the church’s missionary witness “is always dialogic, including both the church’s inner dialogue with its own culture and its outward dialogue with all others and their respective cultures.”⁸⁹

4. Mission as Discipleship

“Mission is not just church extension.”⁹⁰ Newbigin points out that while church growth is desirable, there is a deeper concern in the New Testament (particularly the epistles) for the integrity and

86 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 63.

87 Newbigin, “Context and Conversion,” 304.

88 Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 35.

89 Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 270.

90 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 59.

authenticity of Christian witness.⁹¹ Anxiety and enthusiasm for rapid growth is not a biblical outlook. “In no sense does the triumph of God’s reign seem to depend upon the growth of the church.”⁹² In fact, such an emphasis can even be dangerous: “When numerical growth is taken as the criterion of judgment on the church, we are transported with alarming ease into the world of the military campaign or the commercial sales drive.”⁹³ In such cases we forget that the church is not the agent of mission and regress back to our own efforts. Such a movement away from the personal reality and presence of God renders mission functional and pragmatic, leading us to focus on methods and techniques for making converts. Success becomes defined by the ‘bottom-line’ of numbers and statistics. For Newbigin, mission is primarily the work of God and “ministerial leadership is, first and finally, discipleship.”⁹⁴ True conversion embraces discipleship and requires a radical shift in one’s life, which is accomplished and applied holistically by the Holy Spirit. The church’s mission, therefore, includes leading people into a deeper relationship with God, teaching them the Scriptures, and equipping them to be witnesses of the gospel and bearers of the Spirit in their own spheres of influence—their neighbourhoods, workplaces, and extra-curricular activities in the greater community. Newbigin remarks, “A preaching of the gospel that calls men and women to accept Jesus as Savior but does not make it clear that discipleship means commitment to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today must be condemned as false.”⁹⁵

Discipleship is costly because it embraces a public way of life that challenges the reigning plausibility structures of the surrounding culture. Accepting Christ’s call to be his witnesses means living according to a different set of priorities, ethics, and convictions about the way society should be. Sometimes this will involve confronting sinful and oppressive elements in culture, whether these are laws,

91 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 125.

92 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 125.

93 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 127.

94 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 241.

95 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 132.

institutions, or powerful leaders. Such a call to witness promises not worldly power and privilege but cruciform weakness and suffering. As Newbigin reminds us:

[Jesus'] ministry entailed the calling of individual men and women to personal and costly discipleship, but at the same time it challenged the principalities and powers, the ruler of this world, and the cross was the price paid for that challenge. Christian discipleship today cannot mean less than that.⁹⁶

A Missionary Encounter Between Gospel and Culture

Having identified some of the key elements in Newbigin's analysis of western culture and explained Newbigin's understanding of mission, we can now inquire: what would a missionary encounter with our culture look like? Or, to pose the question differently, what must the church be in order to proclaim the gospel faithfully in the present context? A preliminary answer is that the church must exist as a public assembly,⁹⁷ which God has called out to demonstrate "in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all."⁹⁸ It must do this in such a way that avoids the two extremes of syncretism and irrelevance. In the former the church embodies the gospel in the language, forms, and trends of culture but fails to challenge it, while in the latter the church challenges culture without sufficient embodiment or communication in ways the culture can understand.⁹⁹ Thus, the people of God must live authentically before God and others in loving outreach to the world; in short, it must be a *missionary* or *missional* church.

96 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 220.

97 We need not accept the lexical and etiological basis of Newbigin's argument (re. *ecclesia*) to grant on other grounds (perhaps on the depiction of the church in books like Ephesians and 1 Peter) his larger point that the church is a called-out kingdom community, one both gathered together as Christ's body in worship and edification and scattered into the world as Christ's ambassadors.

98 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 16-17.

99 Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 240.

1. The Missionary Congregation and the Beginnings of the Missional Church Concept¹⁰⁰

There are a number of aspects to Newbigin's conception of the missionary church. Primary among these is the relational character of the church, which is based on the nature of God, humanity, and salvation. "Humans reach their true end in such relatedness, in bonds of mutual love and obedience that reflect the mutual relatedness in love in the being of the Triune God himself."¹⁰¹ This mutual relatedness, moreover, is not "merely part of the journey toward the goal of salvation, but is intrinsic to the goal itself."¹⁰² Therefore, the Christian church is not a collection of self-sufficient individuals, each one embarking on his or her quest for spiritual enlightenment. If this were the case, there would be no real purpose for the church, since each person could pursue God in isolated fashion. The church is about a relationship with God *and* others; it is about spiritual *and* physical realities; it is concerned with individuality *and* togetherness, private *and* public life. Along these lines, Newbigin notes that the vision of the *eschaton* given in the book of Revelation is not that of a purely spiritual existence, but that of a city.¹⁰³ Summing up, he writes, "In the final consummation of God's loving purpose we and all creation will be caught up into the perfect rapture of that mutual love which is the life of God Himself. What is given to us now can only be a foretaste, for none of us can be made whole till we are made whole together."¹⁰⁴

Relatedness is fundamental to the Christian church also because the life of Christ is evident in it or, as Newbigin puts it, "Christ is the

100 While Newbigin employed the terminology of 'missionary congregation' or the church's 'missionary encounter with culture' (e.g., *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 234-41), the Gospel and Our Culture Network reshaped and developed Newbigin's ideas and formulated the term 'missional church.' See especially Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998).

101 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 118-19.

102 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 82.

103 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 69-70.

104 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 130.

life of believers.”¹⁰⁵ Christ is present with and in his people, and he reveals himself to the world through them.¹⁰⁶ Through the Spirit, Christ binds his people together with the same love shared by the Trinity, and this foretaste of the divine life among God’s people is a sign and evidence of the gospel to the world. For this reason, Newbigin strongly stresses the importance of unity in the church and argues for the expansion of ecumenical partnership.¹⁰⁷ He states, “These two tasks—mission and unity—must be prosecuted together and in indissoluble relation one with another.”¹⁰⁸ For, “The Church’s unity is the sign and the instrument of the salvation which Christ has wrought and whose final fruition is the summing-up of all things in Christ.”¹⁰⁹

Another aspect of the missionary congregation is that it is called to announce the kingdom, reign, and sovereignty of God. Both the content and the mode of this announcement are important to Newbigin. Its content involves calling men and women to repent of false loyalties to all other powers, to recognize Christ as the only ultimate authority, and to become corporately a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the coming kingdom.¹¹⁰ The form the announcement takes is that of personal and corporate testimony. The church exists to testify that God is a reality and that we can know God and direct our lives according to God’s purposes.¹¹¹ As a testimony, or witness, the message is born out of the church’s lived experience of the power and presence of God in its midst. This announcement of the gospel must not be confined to the private sphere—it is to be presented in public like all other truth claims and evaluated as such. The church is not permitted to retreat to the private sphere. As Newbigin often remarks,

105 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 69.

106 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 52.

107 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 149-52

108 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 152.

109 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 149. This is in keeping with Christ’s words, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

110 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 124.

111 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 94.

[T]he earliest church never availed itself of the protection it could have had under Roman law as a *cultus privatus* dedicated to the pursuit of a purely personal and spiritual salvation for its members....It knew itself to be the bearer of the promise of the reign of Yahweh over all nations.¹¹²

To summarize what he means by a missionary encounter between gospel and culture, Newbigin posits seven essentials for the missionary church. First, we must recover a robust biblical and pneumatological eschatology.¹¹³ Having a clear sense of direction, and being guided by a sure goal and future, the church lives in contradiction to the purposelessness and aimlessness of the world. By their witness, Christians proclaim the gospel with confident humility, aware of the fact that they live in a time period caught between the tension of ‘already’ and ‘not yet.’ While the church is not permitted to retreat into the private sphere, it also must avoid being egotistical or forceful, expecting to establish the fullness of the kingdom in the present.¹¹⁴ Second, we must articulate a Christian doctrine of freedom, which is capable of distinguishing tolerance from indifference.¹¹⁵ Such a doctrine would help the church to transcend the public-private dichotomy by making universal claims for truth while simultaneously listening to and respecting the views of others. Third, Newbigin argues for a “declericalized” theology.¹¹⁶ The church must discard the notion that mission is the work of professionals that are paid to care for souls. While pastors are necessary for equipping the church, ministry must be given back into the hands of lay people, who can subsequently bring the gospel to their respective spheres of influence. Fourth, there must be a radical critique of the theory and practice of denominationalism.¹¹⁷ This relates very closely to Newbigin’s

112 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 99-100.

113 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 134.

114 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 137.

115 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 137. See also Hillier’s suggestive article on Žizek’s critique of western liberalism’s doctrine of tolerance.

116 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 141.

117 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 144.

emphasis on the importance of church unity and the integrity of the gospel. Furthermore, Newbigin argues that the concept and practice of denominationalism is “the social form in which the privatization of religion is expressed.”¹¹⁸ The existence of denominations reinforces the view that the church is merely an association of individuals who share the same private opinions.¹¹⁹ At the very least, denominations should begin to engage in joint ministry and ecumenical discussion. Fifth, the missionary church seeks dialogue with and feedback from Christians whose minds have been shaped by other cultures.¹²⁰ Such intercultural dialogue could help to safeguard the Christotelic multiculturalism envisioned in the Bible (i.e., in passages like Rev 5:9) and protect us from naïve idiosyncratic or ethnocentric interpretations of the gospel.¹²¹ Thus, intercultural dialogue would be fruitful in freeing the church and the Bible from captivity to western culture and allowing the gospel to confront it afresh. Sixth, the missionary church must have the courage to hold to and proclaim a belief that cannot be proven in the terms set out by our culture.¹²² It must remember that conversion is a radical paradigm shift, which can only be accomplished by the Spirit. Finally, the church’s mission must be the “spontaneous overflow of a community of praise.”¹²³

2. The Congregation as the Hermeneutic of the Gospel

The congregation as the ‘hermeneutic of the gospel’ is an important image in Newbigin’s conception of the missionary church. The congregation is the place where believers rehearse the words, deeds, and sacraments of Christ. By constantly envisioning, re-enacting, and proclaiming the gospel, the people of God are placed within the plausibility structure of a biblical worldview. When the church does this faithfully, people find that the gospel gives them “the framework

118 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 145.

119 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 146.

120 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 146.

121 Brownson, “Speaking the Truth in Love: Elements of a Missional Hermeneutic,” *International Review of Mission* 83 (July 1994): 485, 483.

122 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 148.

123 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 149.

for understanding, the ‘lenses’ through which they are able to understand and cope with the world.”¹²⁴ The gospel is God’s answer to the human condition of being alienated from God, from one another, and from Creation. Through it, humanity comes to know and realize its purpose and destination. However, the gospel is not merely a collection of facts, ideas, or eternal truths. It is much more than this—it is the personal revelation of a relational God. Thus, it must be narrated, indwelled, enacted, proclaimed in a living community. As Newbigin is fond of pointing out:

It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. . . . It was not that a community gathered round an idea, so that the idea was primary and the community secondary. It was that a community called together by the deliberate choice of the Lord Himself, and re-created in Him, gradually sought—and is seeking—to make explicit who He is and what He has done. The actual community is primary: the understanding of what it is comes second.¹²⁵

In addition, the congregation as the ‘hermeneutic of the gospel’ becomes an important sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God for the surrounding unbelieving culture. Since most people in contemporary post-Christian cultures possess very little knowledge of the Bible and of basic Christian doctrines, their only experience of Christianity is likely to be their encounters with Christians from a local congregation. Thus, a congregation of men and women, who believe, embody, and enact the gospel in their everyday lives, provides its surrounding neighbourhoods and communities with the

124 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227. On a similar note, Newbigin writes, “. . . our use of the Bible is analogous to our use of language. We indwell it rather than looking at it from outside But for this to happen it is clear that this ‘indwelling’ must mean being part of the community whose life is shaped by the story which the Bible tells” (*Truth to Tell*, 47).

125 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 27. See also *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

lens through which they can begin to interpret and understand the message of Christ. In this manner, the church becomes a “living epistle.”¹²⁶ James Brownson points out that Newbigin intends his ‘hermeneutic of the gospel’ concept to transcend the public-private dichotomy and provide a way for the gospel to become public truth. It thereby overcomes our culture’s relativism, which espouses that “religious speech can never be true, but only ‘true for you.’”¹²⁷

There are six main characteristics of the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. First, such a congregation will be a community of praise and thanksgiving, rather than of doubt and suspicion.¹²⁸ This will occur as the congregation learns to ‘indwell’ the gospel, thereby narrating its own life in light of it and seeing the world through it.¹²⁹ Second, it will be a community of truth governed by a plausibility structure shaped according to the Christian understanding of human nature and destiny.¹³⁰ It will not speak this truth forcefully or through modern means of propaganda, but with the “modesty, the sobriety, and the realism which are proper to a disciple

126 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 51.

127 Brownson provides an excellent summary of Newbigin’s vision, as follows: “How we speak is as important to our missional vocation as what we speak. In this sense, Newbigin is quite right to speak of the local congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. It is ultimately through our lives, in all of their contingency and local particularity, that the universal claims of the gospel will find a credible voice in the midst of our fragmented and suspicious world. It is only when the announcement “Jesus is Lord” is spoken by someone who takes the posture of a servant that it can ever be heard as the gospel. It is only through the convergence of word and deed that the fragmented suspicion of our postmodern world will be able to discover a new Way that is also Truth and Life.” (Brownson, “Speaking the Truth in Love,” 503-4)

128 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

129 Newbigin (*Truth to Tell*, 45-47) borrows the term ‘indwelling’ from the philosopher Michael Polanyi. Polanyi uses the term to explain the function of tacit knowledge. We come to grasp something by turning from subsidiary clues to the reality we are exploring. As an example, when we first learn to read and write we focus on individual letters and sounds in order to recognise and assemble words and sentences. Eventually this primary skill becomes part of our make-up, our tacit knowledge, and we no longer devote our attention to the preliminary details. Rather, we work through them, placing our focus on the meaning or reality to which they point. Thus, we indwell the clues rather than focus on them. Similarly, Christians do not primarily look at the gospel but understand themselves and the world *through* it.

130 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 228-229.

of Jesus.”¹³¹ Third, it will be a community that lives not for itself but is deeply concerned for its neighbours.¹³² As a missionary people created and commissioned by the triune, missionary God, it will be a church that exists for God and for others.¹³³ Fourth, it will be a place where men and women are equipped and disciplined to be ministers of the gospel, making full use of the multiplicity of gifts God has given to the church.¹³⁴ For, “the exercise of priesthood is not within the walls of the Church but in the daily business of the world.”¹³⁵ Fifth, it will be a community of mutual responsibility. Resisting the individualism of the surrounding culture, its people will enter into a committed, loving relationship with one another. Thus, the community will not be primarily the promoter of programs, but the foretaste of a new social order.¹³⁶ Finally, in contrast to the pessimism, hopelessness, and aimlessness of modern western culture, it will be a community characterized by the hope of the gospel of Christ, which it indwells and lives out.¹³⁷

Conclusion

In the thought of Lesslie Newbigin the church engages its surrounding culture, both culturally and politically, as a missional community. In so doing, the church embodies a different way of life, one narrated by Scripture and oriented to the kingdom of God. In the context of western, post-Christian societies, this way of life will expose and confront unexamined assumptions that undergird the

131 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229.

132 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229.

133 See Franklin, “Bonhoeffer’s Missional Ecclesiology,” 115-17.

134 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 230.

135 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 230.

136 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 231.

137 Newbigin cites the Carver Yu’s observation that western culture is characterized by “technological optimism and literary despair.” He explains, “On the one hand he sees the unstoppable dynamism of our technology, always forging ahead with new means to achieve whatever ends—wise or foolish—we may desire. On the other hand he looks at our literature and sees only scepticism, nihilism, and despair. Life has no point. Nothing is sacred. Reverence is an unworthy relic of past times. Everything is a potential target for mockery” (*Truth to Tell*, 19; see also *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 232).

cultural plausibility structures and social imaginaries that set the terms for how people think about religion and public life. Particularly problematic assumptions include the separation of facts / public life from values / private life, the bracketing out of purpose questions (teleology) in public discourse, and (on the part of the church) a Christendom mindset that fails to recognize and address the captivity of the gospel to western culture. To cultivate this kind of life, the church needs to regain a robust theology of mission, one which understands the significance of election in the mission of God to save the world, has a holistic doctrine of conversion, is thoroughly pneumatological and trinitarian in its self-understanding and practice, and emphasizes the centrality of discipleship for genuine Christian witness in the world. A church formed by a missional theology such as this will humbly and faithfully live its life as an embodied proclamation, a “living epistle” and “hermeneutic of the gospel,” within the concrete cultural space that God has placed and commissioned it.



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