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The Wesleyan Theological Consortium exists to labour in the development of Wesleyan theological education, across the denominational spectrum. It is committed to bearing witness to that 'union between vital piety and sound learning' proposed by John Wesley.

Aldersgate Papers made its first appearance as the theological journal of the short-lived Christian Holiness Association (Australia) in October 1994. It contained two articles and did not proceed beyond a single issue in that format. In September 2000 it was resurrected, this time as the theological journal of Kingsley College, bearing a September 2000 date. The Wesleyan Theological Consortium first began meeting in 1999, following each Biennial Conference of the South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges (SPABC). These informal meetings arose out of the recognition that Kingsley College, Melbourne and Nazarene Theological College, Brisbane had much in common as Wesleyan educational institutions, and out of a desire to work together, rather than duplicating efforts, wherever possible. These times have included formal delivery of academic papers, as well as fellowship and casual conversation around common areas of passionate interest.

When the Consortium met in Sydney on 4 July 2003, immediately following the 20th Biennial Conference of the SPABC, it was decided that *Aldersgate Papers*, should become the journal of the consortium, costs being shared by member institutions (at that time, Kingsley College and the Nazarene Theological College). This seventh number of the journal is the fourth and last under this arrangement. In July 2009 Booth College, Sydney, a higher education provider of the Salvation Army, also entered into the publication of the journal. Though originally intended to appear twice a year, the production schedule has been a little slow and a single issue a year has appeared in September of most years since. Production schedule has slipped behind and current issue, volume 7, has a September 2009 cover date. There is no 2007 or 2008 number of the journal. Apologies are due to patient subscribers who have waited long for this current issue. The next number of the Journal will be a peer-reviewed journal, the product of an editorial team, and the official publication of the newly-formed *Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Studies*.

Abstracts from the journal are listed in *Religious and Theological Abstracts* http://rtabstracts.org/

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8. M. A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 96-97.

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9. Noll, 112.

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10. William Baldwin, *A Treatise of morall philosophy Contaynynge the sayings of the wyse* (London, 1579) .

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11. U. K. *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th ser. , vol.13 (1893), cols.1273-74. *and subsequently* :

12. *Parl. Deb.* , Lords, 5th ser. , 13 (1893): 1273.

Archival Source:

13. Report of the Committee into Convict Discipline, 24 March 1842, CSO 22/50, Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart.

Manuscript:

14. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 581, fols. 23-24v. and subsequently

15. Bodley 581, fol. 23.

Judeo-Christian Scriptures:

16. Heb. 13:8, 12-13.

For standard scriptural abbreviations see *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14.34-35.

Classical and Medieval References:

17. Abelard *Epistle* 17 to *Heloise* (Migne PL 180.375c-378a).

18. Cicero *De officiis* 1.133, 140.

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CHARLES WESLEY, THE MEN OF OLD CALABAR, AND THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY[1]

Joanna Cruickshank

This article examines a small body of correspondence from the captives Ephraim Robin John and Ancona Robin John, to Charles Wesley in 1774. They give us a first-hand description of the experience of conditions aboard a slave ship and provide a glimpse into the relationship between slaves and Methodists in the years before the abolition of slavery became an issue for evangelicals in England. The resourcefulness and determination of the Robin Johns to return to their home country demonstrates that slaves may not be seen merely as helpless victims rescued from their plight by benevolent Europeans. Instead they could draw on their own experience and skills to overcome their trials. The language of the letters is pervaded with Methodist piety and suggests that in the 1770s slave trading was seen as wrong by Methodists, helping us to explain their later involvement in the abolitionist movement led by Quakers and Anglicans. Though we know little with certainty about Charles Wesley's views on slavery, this small body of correspondence suggests that he was convinced of its evils and that he contributed, even if in a small way, to its final abolition.

Several years ago, I was looking through the papers of Charles Wesley in the Methodist archives in Manchester when I came across some unusual letters. Among the hundreds of letters that Charles Wesley received and wrote, there is a small collection from two young Methodist converts in Bristol named Ephraim Robin John and Ancona Robin John. Many young converts wrote to Charles for advice or to report their spiritual experiences and in some ways these letters were not unusual. The first surviving letter informed Charles:

> We have been informed by Mr Jones that you was ill when he left London for which we are Extremely Sorry and Shall always offer up twenty Prayers for your health. Yesterday we had the pleasure of seeing

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[1] This paper was delivered at the Symposium held at Kingsley College on 24 October 2007 to mark the Tercentenary of the Birth of Charles Wesley.

> your brother he preached at the Room both morning and evening... but so many people follow'd Him he had not time to talk with us then.[2]

This solicitous concern for Charles's health and news of his busy brother John was fairly standard among the letters Charles regularly received. What made these two men and their letters stand out from Charles's other correspondents, however, was that the two converts were Africans and ex-slaves. In their letters to Charles they described their extraordinary experiences, which included a narrow escape from a massacre, enslavement, several journeys across the Atlantic and a long struggle for freedom involving the highest legal authorities in England.

As well as telling a dramatic story, these letters are historically significant. They give us an account of the experience of slavery from the pen of those who had experienced it – an unusual thing in itself. More broadly they provide a rare picture of an encounter between slaves and Methodists in the years before the abolition of slavery became a burning issue for evangelicals in England. The letters were written in 1774 – fifteen years before Wilberforce made his first speech on the issue of slavery to parliament. In the long term, of all English evangelicals, Methodists became the most passionate supporters of abolition – Methodist women were the single largest group to sign the massive anti-slavery petition of 1831.[3] It is therefore interesting to look at this early encounter for what it reveals about Methodist attitudes to slavery in this earlier period.

When I found the letters I was excited – they are listed in the catalogue of Charles Wesley's papers, but I had never seen them mentioned in any scholarship on either Wesley or on British slavery. While they weren't really relevant to the research I was doing at the time, I thought they would make a wonderful book later on. Sadly for me, I was pipped at the post. A couple of years ago, an American historian named Randy Sparks brought out a book on the two men which begins with the story of Sparks' exciting discovery of the letters in the Manchester archives![4] So I am not going to be the first to tell this story. But, since 2007 happens to mark both the

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[2] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 8 August 1774. DDCW 2/3. Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC), John Rylands University Library Manchester.
[3] David Hempton and John Walsh, "E.P. Thompson and Methodism," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money and the Market, 1790-1860* ed. Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.
[4] Randy Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Odyssey* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004).

tercentenary of Charles Wesley's birth and the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, I thought it might be a good opportunity to tell the extraordinary story of the Robin Johns as recorded in their letters to Charles Wesley. Even though Charles Wesley's voice is largely silent in this story – he is the recipient of the letters rather than their author – we do learn something about him from the way the men related to him.

The Robin Johns were originally from the region of Old Calabar, an important trade centre on the Bight of Biafra, in what is now Nigeria.[5] Ephraim was the brother of the most powerful man in Old Calabar, Grandy King George Robin John, and Ancona Robin was their nephew. The Robin Johns were the wealthiest and most influential clan in Calabar and their wealth and influence came from their involvement in one of the most lucrative trades of the time: the trade in slaves. Each year, the slave ships of Britain docked at the sea port of Old Calabar, and bought thousands of slaves that the Robin Johns and their clan had abducted on raids up into the Niger River region. The clan developed close working relationships with the British slave traders and acquired the skills and trappings of the international traders of the time. Probably, as in many similar slave-trading clans, the sons of the leading men learned to write or at least read a level of English. Grandy King George purchased furniture and fine goods from the British traders and dressed in European attire on important occasions.

In 1767, however, trouble flared up between Grandy King George and a rival slave-trading clan. The rivalry between the two clans virtually brought trade to a stop, as the two groups blocked each others' access to the regions where slaves were raided. The British slave ship captains, frustrated that slaves were becoming increasingly sparse and expensive, became involved in the conflict. Grandy King George and his closest men were invited to come on board the docked slave ships as a neutral space in which a deal could be brokered between the two clans. Ephraim and Ancona, as members of Grandy King George's family, were included in this group, as was another royal brother, Ambo Robin John.

It is from this point in the story that we gain a perspective from the participants themselves. In his second surviving letter to Charles Wesley, Ancona recounted that he, Ephraim and Ambo, while

[5] The following information about Old Calabar and the clan of Grandy King George comes from Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar*, 10-32.

waiting on one of the slave ships, began to realise that they had been betrayed. He wrote:

> My Brother Ambo upon the first appearance of the fraud which was discovered by the Captain and mate coming in to the Cabin with pistols which my Brother saw & felt for the Capt. Stroke him on the head then my Brother seized the Captain & men & threw them on the floor but behind him were those that were cutting him on ye head and neck till he were spent & 'must all kill'd at which Time he cryed out O Capt. Bevans what fashion is this for white men to killed Black men so he cryed for mercy but obtained none but was thrown up to the hands of his Enemies who cut off his head and on the side of the ship this being Done they sunk ye canoes and drowned more than we can tell.[6]

The British slave ship captains had in fact conspired with the rival slave-trading clan to ambush the Robin Johns. As Ephraim and Ancona watched, the war canoes of the rival clan emerged from hiding places and, with the help of the slave canoes, began attacking the men of their clan. Many were massacred.

This conspiracy and the resulting massacre was, of course, completely illegal and some years later the whole event was to be investigated by the British Parliament. In the short-term it devastated the slave-trading empire of Grandy King George and led to his clan turning to the highly profitable palm sugar trade instead. For Ephraim and Ancona, however, it meant the beginning of an entirely different existence. Like many of those who survived the massacre, they were turned into slaves, and sent on the appalling journey to which they had themselves doomed many others.

For eighteenth and nineteenth century abolitionists – as anyone who has seen the movie *Amazing Grace* will be aware – the most potent symbol of the suffering caused by the slave trade was the slave ship. Here, as the abolitionists informed people, men and women were packed in rows upon rows, with little space and little air, force fed, raped and tortured at any sign of resistance, for the two months or so of the journey from Africa to the Caribbean.[7] In Ancona's account of their enslavement, he does not mention the experience of this journey, though we know from the records that the ship on which they sailed was more tightly packed than many –

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[6] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/4, MARC.

[7] For a good account of slave ships and the abolitionist response to them, see Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005).

with only five square feet per slave – and that of 336 captives who began the journey only 272 survived. It seems quite possible Ephraim and Ancona might have been used as quartermasters on the ship, thus being spared the worst conditions of the slaves.

In Ancona's account, the next thing he mentions is that on arriving in Domenica, the two men were sold to a French doctor. He wrote: "We was treated according to what they could meke of us upon ye whole not badly but we were determined to get home."[8] This determination can be seen as a result of the men's former involvement in the slave trade: unlike many of the people they themselves had sold into slavery, they understood the slave trading system, they could read maps, they knew that people did make their way back to Africa from the plantations of America and the Caribbean. This determination clearly sustained them. But in the short term it did them little good. Ancona wrote that they were then sold on to a Captain Thomson in Virginia who was a far harsher master. "He would tie me up & whip me many times for nothing at all then some time because I could not Dress his Diner for im not understanding how to it and he was excidingly badly men ever I saw."[9] Reporting his ill treatment at the hands of Captain Thomson, Ancona commented "I hope almighty great God he observe me from all Great Danger... and gave me knowledge to remember what I have suffer[ed]."[10]

This reference to God's observation of his danger perhaps relates to what Ancona next recounted: while walking on deck one day, after complaining of a belly ache, Captain Thomson suddenly fell down dead. This terrified all those on the ship, Ancona wrote "everybody in that case all thinking he has been so bad man and weeked and Great God above s[aw] him how he deserve."[11] With Thomson dead, the two men were able to find a sympathetic British ship's captain, O'Neill who promised to take them back to his home town of Bristol, where they could find passage back to Africa. After much suffering, it seemed as though the Robin Johns might be able to make their way home.

Here Ancona's account breaks off and the story was picked up in a letter written to Charles on the same day by Ephraim. Once back in Bristol, the men prepared to disembark. But, Ephraim wrote, O'Neill

[8] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/4, MARC.
[9] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/4, MARC.
[10] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/4, MARC.
[11] Ancona Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/4, MARC.

> alter'd his mind and never return to us but order the pilot to put us aboard [a transport] vessel which Did to our great surprise & horror when he come to put on the irons we then with ters and trembling began to prayer to God to help us in this Deplorable Condition we lay for 13 days among the wretched transport.[12]

Kept in irons below deck in a ship docked in Bristol, the men were at first in despair, but then Ephraim wrote "the Lord helped us." They remembered a Bristol sea captain, Mr Jones, with whom they had done business when they were slave traders in Calabar. Ephraim wrote several letters to Jones, imploring him to help them and, at the last minute, Jones turned up. When the Captain of the ship refused to release the Robin Johns, Jones got a warrant and had them taken off the ship and put in prison while their case was being decided.

At this point, the muddy waters of British legislation surrounding slavery in the late eighteenth century came to the brothers' aid. Two years earlier, in 1772, the Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield, had ruled that an escaped slave named James Somerset who had made his way to England from America, could not be re-enslaved under British law. This ruling was not intended to outlaw slavery in Britain, but it did open some complicated legal loopholes that at this time were being explored. Ephraim was obviously aware of this process, because from the prison in Bristol he wrote directly to Lord Mansfield. Mansfield had the men taken to London, where he examined them. After some further legal wrangling, including some skillful legal arguments from Ephraim, Mansfield discharged them under the same legal provisions which had freed Somerset. Finally, six years after they had been taken into slavery, they were free men.

This, then, was the story of the Robin Johns' journey across the world – from Africa to the Caribbean, to Virginia, to Bristol. But what about their spiritual journey? The letters of Ephraim and Ancona are full of the language of Methodist piety. Ephraim began the narrative letter I have just been quoting with an account of his spiritual progress:

> Blessed be the Lord he gives us to Reading his Word all the Daylong and it is very sweet to us your Brother has been so kind as to talk to us and has given us the Sacrament thrice. I find him so good as to shew me where I do wrong I feel in My heart great trouble & see great deal more

[12] Ephraim Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/5, MARC.

> of my own faults & the faults of my Country men which I hope the Lord will permit me to tell them when I get home.[13]

How and why did two African ex-slaves come to embrace the spiritual world and language of the Methodists? Ephraim wrote that while in Bristol they had told Mr Jones that they wanted to "read is Lord Word" and that they had then been introduced to Charles himself. "After which you read to us that which we were so new and good to us that we were glad to hear it every Day and still we find it Better and Better."[14] This suggests that their exposure to Methodism was relatively recent, but in their accounts of their enslavement, they repeatedly mention praying or calling out to God. And their desire to hear the Lord's Word read indicates some spiritual interest.

In his book, Randy Sparks speculates about the meanings of and motivations for Ephraim and Ancona's conversion. He notes the openness to new ideas within the religion of the Calabar region from which the brothers came – a monotheistic religion known as Ekpe; the value of conversion to Christianity for those like the Robin Johns who wanted acceptance in British culture; as well as the attractions of Methodism itself, as a relatively egalitarian religious movement.[15] Interestingly, when Ancona wrote about his mistreatment by his harsh master, Captain Thompson, he recounted an occasion on which a man on ship tried unsuccessfully to stop Thompson from flogging Ancona. This man, Ancona said, seemed to be very sorry that Ancona was flogged – "seemed to be good Chrastian." This suggests that the Robin Johns had already developed some distinction between the behaviour of their violent master and that of a 'good Chrastian'.

Whatever the reasons, Ancona and Ephraim professed conversion and wrote of their love for Scripture, their comfort in the sacraments, their spiritually significant dreams and their desire to amend their lives – all typical characteristics of the ardent Methodist in the late eighteenth century.

This spiritual change had implications for their future lives. As the quote from Ephraim suggests, the two men desired to return to Calabar and tell their people the Gospel. Ephraim said that he was increasingly aware of "my own faults & the faults of my Countrymen." One of the faults of which he appears to have become

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[13] Ephraim Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/5, MARC.
[14] Ephraim Robin John to Charles Wesley, 17 August 1774. DDCW 2/5, MARC.
[15] Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar*, 107-126.

conscious was that of his slave-trading past. This becomes clear in a letter written from Ephraim to Charles later in 1774. Ephraim wrote that it was "much on my Mind that [] how shall I pay My good friend Mr Jones who has been so kind in laying out so much money to searve us?"[16] Jones had not only rescued and accommodated the men, but also paid out large sums of money to secure them berth on a ship back to Calabar. Ephraim continued "if we must not sell slaves I know not how we shall pay him."

Clearly, under Methodist discipling, the brothers had been told that slave-trading was incompatible with the Christian life. This suggests that quite early in the movement – by the 1770s – slave trading was seen as wrong. And specifically, that Charles Wesley was convinced of this. In fact, we know little of Charles's views on slavery. We know that, like John, he had been confronted by the experience of slavery in America in 1736, and he wrote in his diary of his horror at the cruel practices of slave owners.[17] But though John Wesley wrote powerfully against slavery, I have not found any equivalent statement by Charles. Of the six thousand or so hymns that he wrote, there are plenty on social and political issues, from the American War of Independence to the practice of women sending their children to wet nurses, but none on slavery. Here, though, it becomes clear that he was preaching that slavery and Methodist faith were incompatible.

The troubles of the Robin Johns were not entirely over. In August 1774, they boarded a ship purchased by Mr Jones, in order to take them back to Calabar. But the Captain was drunk and ran the ship aground. Within a week or two the men were back in Bristol. It took another six weeks for Jones to find a ship that would take them and this time they were able to make it safely back to Calabar. A year later, Charles wrote in a letter that "my 2 African children got safe home." Ancona had written that they were preaching their new-found faith and though their countrymen had originally laughed at them, "many...were now glad to sit by and hear them read the Bible." History is generally less neat than fiction and, in spite of Ephraim's good resolutions, it seems that the two men probably became involved in slave-trading again.[18] But a few years after they arrived

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[16] Ephraim Robin John to Charles Wesley, included in letter from Elizabeth Johnson to Charles Wesley, 27 August 1774. DDCW 2/9, MARC.
[17] See 2 August 1736, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, ed. Thomas Jackson, vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 36-37.
[18] Randy Sparks suggests that this was the most likely outcome. Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar*, 127-145.

home, they invited the English Methodists to send missionaries to Calabar, which resulted in a brief Methodist mission there.

Well, this is an interesting story out of the archives, but what is its historical significance? I'd suggest a few things. In the first place, I note Ancona's strong statement of the men's determination to get home, their actions in writing to Mr Jones from their imprisonment in the ship; writing to the Chief Justice and making detailed legal arguments about their case; seeking spiritual knowledge through contact with the Methodists. The history of abolition has suffered somewhat from a tendency to portray slaves simply as helpless victims, rescued by the benevolence of good white men like Wilberforce. This account reminds us that slaves were not simply victims but people who drew on their own resources and will power to respond to the appalling experience that befell them. Not all of them had Ancona and Ephraim's opportunities and skills, but many acted in profoundly determined, resourceful and courageous ways to survive the experience of slavery.

In addition, this story provides new evidence for the long-term opposition of Methodists to slavery. This perhaps helps explain why Methodists joined so enthusiastically in the abolitionist movement, even though its main leaders were Quakers and Anglicans.

Finally, it gives us a new perspective on Charles Wesley. Even though Charles is silent for much of this narrative, he is the focus of much affection and respect from Ancona and Ephraim. They clearly valued his pastoral ministry to them and found him a caring and supportive friend. Recent studies of Charles Wesley have emphasised his ability as a pastor, and these letters certainly add to that argument. It also gives us evidence of an area in which he was socially radical – a surprise, in some ways, because in many areas he was politically and socially conservative. Clearly, however, he was preaching that slave trading and Christian faith were mutually exclusive. In this small way, I like to think, he contributed to the long-term battle for the abolition of slavery.

CHARLES WESLEY ON WORK AND DIVINE UBIQUITY: REFLECTIONS ON "FORTH IN THY NAME O LORD I GO, MY DAILY LABOUR TO PURSUE..."[1]

John Mark Capper

Work occupies a major part of human life. Its role is affirmed and its practitioners are encouraged in Scripture. It has become a major and serious topic of theological reflection, however, only in the late twentieth century. Yet Charles Wesley penned probably the most comprehensive hymnic reflection on work in his "Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go" in 1749. This paper introduces this hymn with attention to both the theology and social activism of the ministry of John and Charles Wesley. It notes the positive view of work, against a current view that work is just an opportunity for "real" (that is, evangelistic) ministry. The oft excluded third verse is considered in the light of the deceptions that work can bring and as a call to stand against the current scourge of workaholism. The paper concludes with a call to holistic thinking as regards God's engagement in the world and, in the light of that, the place that work plays in life, service, worship and joy.

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It is a joy to engage my Wesleyan roots through this article. My father was born and raised a Methodist, and the Cappers of Cheshire were movers and shakers, and layers of many foundation stones, in many Primitive Methodist chapels. That my father, in marrying an Anglican, reverted to Anglicanism is either a sign of his returning to his tradition's roots or of tragic backsliding, depending on one's perspective. I remain a backslidden Wesleyan, and like John and Charles Wesley, hope to end my days as an ordained member of that strange Anglican sect. Now, to the promised topic: Charles Wesley on Work and Divine Ubiquity: A Reflection on "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go, My Daily Labour to Pursue..."

Work occupies a major part of human life.

[1] This paper was delivered at the Symposium held at Kingsley College on 24 October 2007 to mark the Tercentenary of the Birth of Charles Wesley.

Work – like death and taxes, in the popular imagination, is inescapable, necessary, and for the most part, a burden. How much more so was this the case in the time of the Wesleys when there were longer working days, in the age before electric light; heavier work, in days of only moderately powerful machinery, and education as a less necessary preparation for vocation than it is today for most.

Christians have had, through the centuries, a love-hate relationship with work. It has occupied much of life, but little time in the pulpit. In recent centuries, so it seems, much has been done in discipling to prepare Christians for the sure and certain hope of the life to come, whilst little effort has been expended in equipping the flock for the grind of the weekly forty-plus hours of labour. The recent move to consider work, and indeed the whole of the everyday, as a topic of theology is welcome, and we have Australian theologian Robert Banks largely to thank for that. Both in his role as Homer Goddard Professor of the Laity at Fuller Seminary, and most recently at the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute in Sydney, Rob has elevated the profile of the everyday in theological exploration. His reminder that God is not only omnipresent, but interested in the ubiquitous aspects of the world created, in the quotidian tasks of humankind, and the particular expressions of faith that find expression there, is a welcome move. Banks has begun a move that has had widespread influence. To this we will return.

Work's role is affirmed and its practitioners are encouraged in Scripture.

A biblical theology of work would note that God placed the first humans in the primeval Eden with the command to the man to "work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15, NIV). This was indeed the same God and the same humanity introduced in the earlier chapter as made in God's own image (Gen 1:26-27). And, indeed, it is God at work that we first meet in Scripture, both canonically and chronologically. It is in work within and care for the environment that we first encounter humanity at work. We are, as Gordon Preece describes us, "junior partners in God's work of creation, preservation and redemption."[2] This work, however, is reconfigured as toil after the breach in relationship that the man and the woman precipitate. Their harmony with God, their harmony with each

[2] Gordon Preece, "Work," in Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds. *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 1124.

other, their harmony with the created world and even their own inner harmony is breached.

> To Adam [God] said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through *painful toil* you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the *sweat of your brow* you will eat our food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Gen. 3:17-19)[3]

It should be noted that this follows on the curse that is given to the woman and all women who follow her, that

> I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Gen 3:16).

What might also be noted is that God's response to the couple he has cursed is to care for them by working for them.

> The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (Gen 3:21)

Suffice it to note here that this is the foundation on which a biblical theology of work can be founded, and it is indeed the basis on which the few explicit biblical reflections are built. Further, this foundation has been built upon, but only sporadically, in the life of the Christian community. It is in evidence, for instance, in Benedict's *Rule*, and in some of the work of Luther, but it has rarely been foregrounded in theological exploration and enquiry.

Work has become a major and serious topic of theological reflection, however, only in the late twentieth century.

This poverty of attention has been somewhat satisfied in recent years with the rise of theological attention, initiated by Robert Banks. This is part of an effort to reverse the dualism that has pervaded modern Christian life and theology, and perhaps pre-eminently the practice of Sunday meetings which are conducted in isolation from everyday life, and which thus suggest that God is

[3] emphasis added

remote at times in which the people of God are not gathered. Banks, and with him R. Paul Stevens of Regent College, Vancouver, have opened up discourse on matters of sleep, unionism, business, business ethics, and work in general. Their work has been well represented here in Melbourne through the work of Gordon Preece, of Ridley College and then Macquarie Christian Studies Institute and of Simon Holt, of Whitley College. Both of these scholars were supervised in their doctoral studies by Robert Banks. This group of scholars has attracted attention more broadly, and there is now a growing movement, based in Fuller, Regent, Macquarie Christian Studies Institute, and arguably Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

Banks and Stevens tell us that

> Everyday life is a complex affair...[T]he major Christian traditions have always insisted...that our religious convictions and values should be reflected in all we do [and] all...activities need to be related to our understanding of God...[4]

The God of life is interested in *all* of life. The incarnation was not just for show, but shows just how much God believes in the value of the fallen but redeemable creation. The redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ includes the redemption of work and its renewed value. In the Lord, Paul tells us (1 Cor 15:58), our labour is not in vain.

God takes interest in the labour of humans. Martin Luther, reacting against the disregard in which trades were held in his time, claimed that the Lord himself milks the cows through the one whose vocation it is. Luther sought to restore vocation as a concept relevant to the whole people of God, not just those with specifically "religious" vocations. "The cobbler, in making shoes," says Luther, "serves and obeys God quite as much as the preacher of the word."[5]

Work is not just a relic of the primeval creation, and it is not constantly corrupted by human disobedience. Rather,

Work is part of the redeemed creation.

And so it is that Luther can say: *Laborare est orare.*[6] All that is done can and should, for Christians, be done in worship of our

[4] Banks and Stevens, vii.
[5] Cited in Preece, 1126.
[6] "To work is to pray."

creator and redeemer, God. The sense, in current society, of personal ownership of and personal definition by, one's career has made this a harder concept for Christians to exemplify and promote. Yet the call to joy in work and to all human life integrated into the life of God in us is real and lasting. Spirituality is at place in all parts of life and all locations. God is not only present everywhere, but active everywhere. So it is that we trace a trajectory of reintegration of work and worship, and into that we place the great hymn which lies at the centre of our attention in this paper.

Charles Wesley penned probably the most comprehensive hymnic reflection on work in his *Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go* in 1749. This was not his only ode to work, nor his only hymn inspired by people in their vocations. Other hymns inspired by work include *See how great a flame aspires* (1746).

See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesus' love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze:
To bring fire on earth He came;
Kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss!

When He first the work begun,
Small and feeble was His day:
Now the word doth swiftly run;
Now it wins its widening way:
More and more it spreads and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail;
Sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.

Sons of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door hath opened wide!
He hath given the word of grace,
Jesus' word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
He alone the work hath wrought;
Worthy is the work of Him,
Him Who spake a world from naught.

Saw ye not the cloud arise,
Little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,

Hangs o'er all the thirsty land:
Lo! the promise of a shower
Drops already from above;
But the Lord will shortly pour
All the spirit of His love.

Jackson states that the hymn was written:

> on the joyful occasion of his ministerial success, and that of his fellow labourers, in Newcastle and vicinity. Perhaps the imagery was suggested by the large fires connected with the colleries, which illuminate the whole of that part of the country in the darkest nights.[7]

This and another are cited by C. H. Spurgeon in his *Lecture on the Two Wesleys*.[8] That other hymn, inspired by work in the stone quarries, includes these words:

Come, O Thou all-victorious Lord!
Thy power to us make known;
Strike with the hammer of Thy Word,
And break these hearts of stone.

Wesley wrote this hymn during a visit to Portland in June, 1746, where the quarrymen's work suggested the theme and the line "Strike with the hammer of Thy Word, and break these hearts of stone." It appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1749. More obliquely, from his *Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures, 1762*.:

O Thou Who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
Upon the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
[*or*, Unquenched, undimmed, in darkest days,]
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

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[7] *Memoirs of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 1848.
[8] Charles H. Spurgeon, "The two Wesleys: A lecture delivered in the Metropolitan Tabernacle lecture hall, on December 6th, 1861."

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work and speak and think for Thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
And make my sacrifice complete.

This paper introduces the hymn which attracts our interest, with attention to both the theology and social activism of the ministry of John and Charles Wesley. I will refer to the hymn by the stanza number and line number, and we will for the most part travel through the hymn in the order in which it was written.

Stanza 1

1.1. Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I go

My own experience of this hymn is shaped by its liturgical placement. It has, in my experience, been used as a final or recessional hymn. It lends itself to the leaving of the gathered community and heading out:

1.2. My daily labour to pursue;

And so there is the key – the leaving of the gathered community is not to a new encounter with God, but an encounter shaped in the context of the quotidian task.

1.3. Thee, only Thee, resolved to know

What makes this engagement with the workaday world different for Christians is that the knowing of Jesus in intimacy and in eucharist is to shape all that we do. Knowledge above all, Knowledge of God above all other knowledge. This is the resolve of the Christian. Him only to know and serve, in all things.

1.4. In all I think or speak or do.

The whole of the life of action is part of the interest that God has in humankind and its work. Here there is a breaking of any

perceived duality. The preacher who had the world for his parish had not just the open spaces, but all places. He had not just the remote, but the central. Not just the deserted, but the populated, and even the crowded. And all of our actions, thoughts and words, are to be part of that whole. So this first stanza has set the scene and has established a wide ranging locus for the graced actions of the people of God.

Stanza 2

So we turn from the general connect of our labours to the particulars of work.

1.5. The task Thy wisdom hath assigned,

Within the context of the daily tasks, Wesley notes God's sovereignty, in that it is God's wisdom, not blind chance, that has assigned the tasks that occupy us.

1.6. O let me cheerfully fulfill;

For Charles Wesley, the Christian was not simply to bear the load, but joyfully to shoulder the load. The response of the Christian is not blind or unquestioning obedience. The Christian does not, at his or her best, respond in obedience merely due to the fear of punishment. Rather, the Christian chooses to serve God with gratitude, gladness and in praise. This is echoed in Karl Barth's description of human obedience.[9]

1.7. In all my works Thy presence find,

Here, as in so much of Wesley, is the sense that God is everywhere and is everywhere attentive, available and accessible.

1.8. And prove Thy good and perfect will.

In the finding is the finding more. In labour is enrichment, not just in fiscal terms, but in growth, in discovery, and in assurance. The God who puts us here, does not leave us here. He shows faithfulness in allowing us to travel and explore.

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[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1.219 and 223, 674

Stanza 4

We skip the third stanza for the moment. Here in the fourth, we see something of the reflexivity of God's presence and encounter.

4.1. Thee may I set at my right hand,

Not only is God there and at work, God is to be set in his place with us. He does not demand a place so much as, for Wesley, he is willing to be invited, and to take up the offer of a place. The one in authority is to be the King of Glory, in his way, and in his time.

4.2. Whose eyes mine inmost substance see,

God's searching presence is not interested only in our appearance. God searches the heart and sees us in our most vulnerable and in our most intimate places, in all of our life.

4.3. And labour on at Thy command,

But we work on not because we are seen, because we are being watched, as it were. We labour because we are bid. For Christians, all jobs are, or at least can be, callings or vocations from God. We are slaves, who are called friends, but we do not forget who is the boss.

4.4. And offer all my works to Thee.

For the Christian, work has a direction. It is not for utilitarian outcomes that we work, but that we might in all our doings be and offer a living sacrifice to God. This is our intention - that we should be closer to an integrated sense of God's presence than we could be if we were to have self-serving motives.

5. Stanza 5

The fifth stanza sets our work in its temporal and its eternal frame. First and foundationally, work for Christians is set in the context of discipleship.

5.1. Give me to bear Thy easy yoke,

It is in the taking up of the cross and the following that we are both seen and show ourselves to be disciples. Taking up the cross and following Jesus is not the end, necessarily, but it is the necessary starting point.

5.2. And every moment watch and pray,

We look to that which is coming. The hope of glory and the expectation of God's redemptive return are in mind, as we think that Jesus and Paul both called the followers of the Messiah to look for his coming again.

5.3. And still to things eternal look,

And so we look to the full, the real, the seen, and these are both a means of staying focused, and of looking beyond the immediate circumstances.

5.4. And hasten to Thy glorious day.

John and Charles Wesley both seem to have had a strong sense of remaining focused by the yet to be fulfilled promise of entry into the glorious presence of the Lord. This might, in this day of awareness of the dangers of "escape-pod" eschatology, be seen to reject the presence of the future as seems to be the case in the work of N.T. Wright, the eminent New Testament scholar and Bishop of Durham.

6. Stanza 6

So with focus on the task and with the cosmic frame in place, we turn to the pleromatic aspect of the work of God in us. The task is cosmic in its scope. It is to be lived and to be lived into. And in all it is filled with joy and delight.

6.1. For Thee delightfully employ

Here we see that the task is configured as one of joy and delight. Not just responsibly employed; not just obediently undertaken; the task is one that involves the joyful obedience of Christians. The shovel makes delightful music for God when used well and for the right reasons. So likewise the flute is a means of expressing joy at God's grace and generosity.

6.2. Whate'er Thy bounteous grace hath giv'n;

We say with David and with the Prayer Book that the Wesleys used, "all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Our role in work is to work with God, and with the raw materials that God has provided. Of ourselves we make nothing, at least, we make nothing from *nothing*. Rather, we work with God as we work for God.

6.3. And run my course with even joy,

Steady, that is the desire. That we might run evenly, and thus moderately fast for the longest possible time. No hare, no tortoise, just solid steps forward. And with them, an openness to what you may need or want.

6.4. And closely walk with Thee to Heav'n.

Here again, Charles Wesley's sense that the end is escape, that freedom comes from release from this world, is in evidence. The view that work is part of godly immersion seems to me to be both better as regards the nature of the incarnation and salvation and also on the grounds of a more circumspect reading of the scriptures. In all this, the focus has been on work, not on any particular job or career. The role of work, for Wesley, is a combination of having utilitarian value, of having value to God, and of being a means of showing our valuing of God and God's presence.

A positive view of work runs against a current view that work is just an opportunity for "real" (that is, evangelistic) ministry.

There is a view abroad that we are only Christians in our workplaces if we are explicitly Christian. Whilst this may in some cases be needed (no one should be eager to avoid speaking of God, when asked, surely?), work as mere opportunity for evangelism seems to be to be an undervaluing of the intrinsic value of work.

Consider the hymn adapted from George Herbert (from *The Temple*, 1633), with modification to verses 2 to 4 by John Wesley in 1738.

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.

To scorn the senses' sway,
While still to Thee I tend:
In all I do be Thou the Way,
In all be Thou the End.

All may of Thee partake;
Nothing so small can be
But draws, when acted for Thy sake,
Greatness and worth from Thee.

If done to obey Thy laws,
E'en servile labors shine;
Hallowed is toil, if this the cause,
The meanest work divine.

Rewritten from Herbert:

A servant with this cause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be sold.

The oft excluded third verse of "Forth in thy name" is considered in the light of the deceptions that work can bring and as a call to stand against the current scourge of workaholism. I note that this is being presented to you by a chronic lover of his own work, and one who spends long hours at his desk, all too rarely writing fun papers, and too often in small tasks...

2. Stanza 3

Turn with me to the third verse:

2.1. Preserve me from my calling's snare,

Every good thing can be a bad thing, and good things done from bad attitudes or for bad reasons have as part of their nature the nature of sin. Even the loftiest calling carries the potential for self- or vocational-idolatry. We need to hold each other accountable. Charles Wesley spells out some further things.

2.2. And hide my simple heart above,

2.3. Above the thorns of choking care,

2.4. The gilded baits of worldly love.

God is, we maintain, interested in and accessible to all those in the world, and home and work and in leisure. This is God's nature. This is how God engages us. It is how we seek to engage with God.

If there is a limitation with Wesley's *Forth in thy name, O Lord, I Go*, it is that it is written almost entirely in the first person singular. This may seem individualistic to us, but it is surely driven out of the sense of community which characterised early Methodism.

And so it is that the paper concludes with a call to holistic thinking as regards God's engagement in the world, and in the light of the place that work plays in life, service, worship and joy. If we are to step once more into the ubiquity of God's presence, we could do no better than to illustrate this at the extremity. If work was not outside Wesley's sense of God's presence, then neither can death be. Hence the wonderful hymn:

Ah, lovely appearance of death!
No sight upon earth is so fair;
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with a dead body compare:
With solemn delight I survey
The corpse when the spirit is fled;
In love with the beautiful clay,
And longing to lie in its stead.

FROM PRACTICAL DIVINITY TO PUBLIC THEOLOGY[1]

Brian Edgar

Despite early twentieth-century attempts to stress the profoundly social dimensions of Christianity, the Western Church has demonstrated a remarkable facility for privatizing faith. The beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a theological reaction which involves the birth of a new movement operating under the name of "public theology." This movement is marked by a breadth of concern for the application of theological principles to all activity which takes place beyond "the four walls of the church." It is argued here that Wesleyan theology has a distinct contribution to make in this area and a direct line of connection between the "Practical Divinity" of John and Charles Wesley and the needs of public theology today is drawn. The following five themes are set forth as contributing helpfully to public theology - Wesleyan theology is essentially public; it is experiential; it follows a conjunctive approach; its doctrine of prevenient grace provides a foundation for engagement with the world, and it stresses social holiness.

In every era the church has as one of its primary theological responsibilities the task of establishing the principles and practices to be employed in its relationship with wider society. The church's perception of its social role, responsibilities and relationships is continually under review as biblical principles interact with cultural norms and historic circumstances. The first Christians lived, with a mixture of acceptance of (Romans 13) and resistance to (Revelation 13) their social context. They lived as aliens within a foreign land, as a new and illegal sect, restricted and persecuted because of faith. Several centuries later there was a radical transformation of the relationship between church and society to what is commonly known as Christendom or Constantinianism where the church took on an official, established role in society to the point where the distinction between the two was blurred or almost non-existent. Since then the church has acted in accordance with various self-

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[1] This paper was delivered at the Symposium held at Kingsley College on 24 October 2007 to mark the Tercentenary of the Birth of Charles Wesley.

perceptions often characterized as, for example, people who live as residents of two cities, as an alternate community, as social reformers, prophetic critics and citizens of a pluralist culture.

The situation at around the start of the twentieth century is exemplified by three significant publications which provide a snap-shot of the state of play at that particular time. They also influenced the church's thinking for much of the twentieth century. The first is Abraham Kuyper's *The Social Question and the Christian Religion* (1891); the second is Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* an encyclical on the "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour" which was produced in the same year; and the third is Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1911 and 1931). Although they differ in some important respects these documents, which represent different traditions of faith, are united in seeing the social responsibility of the church as a matter of the first importance. Despite this, the Western Church of the twentieth century demonstrated a remarkable facility for privatizing faith to such an extent that it has been seen by many to be a primary threat to the life and ministry of the whole church. Consequently, the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a theological reaction which involves the birth of a new movement operating very deliberately under the name of "public theology."

Public theology is marked by a breadth of concern for the application of theological principles to all activity which takes place "outside the four walls of the church." It is a genuinely theological encounter with the world, not merely (as has often been the case in recent times) either an evangelistic encounter or an ethical commentary on what is taking place. It is an intrinsically practical discipline which is corporate in nature. It may be seen as either a sub-set of missiology or simply another way of looking at missiology. Public theology is political in that it constantly engages with politics, but is much more than what used to be called "political theology" as it deals with all areas of life – the arts, politics, education, occupation, entertainment, sport, family and health.

One of the main tasks of public theology as it is currently configured, is a negative one. That is, overcoming the dominant privatised, dualist, hard secularism of the twentieth century. More positively, public theology aims at creating a new form of "natural theology" - that is, a new bridge between reasonable and rational thinking in the wider community on the one hand, and the thinking of the church concerning fundamental biblical principles on the other. The term "public theology" is thus increasingly being used to

speak about the way that biblical and theological principles have relevance for a wide range of issues outside the four walls of the church. Whereas the church has often (particularly in more recent times) related to society with a twin focus involving evangelism and ethics, public theology aims at providing an appropriate theoretical framework for engaging with all dimensions of public life. Public theology recognises that western society cannot be understood in terms of being a Christian culture and this requires a more ambitious program of intellectual thought questioning the basis of modern secular society and the presuppositions which govern all aspects of social life.

Thinking more broadly means applying well-known theological themes differently. Baptism, for instance, is commonly understood as a personal commitment of faith, the sign of spiritual union with Christ and the point of entry into the life of the church. It is less commonly understood as having broad public implications and a radical social agenda. But when the apostle Paul expounded the meaning of baptism for the Galatians (3:26-27) he did not just discuss its personal, experiential and ecclesial implications. As Richard Longenecker comments, he addressed three pairs of relationships which "cover in embryonic fashion all the essential relationships of humanity, and so need to be seen as having racial, cultural and sexual implications."[2] When he said, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" he was addressing profound social implications of three fundamental sets of human relationships which extend beyond the limits of the church. Ben Witherington has referred to Galatians 3:28 as "the Magna Carta of Humanity," a fundamental statement of equality before God, and a kind of constitutional statement which sets a foundation for the way life is to be lived. [3]

Similarly, the Christian concept of forgiveness is widely seen as influencing the form of our relationships with God and others ("forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" - Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4). But properly understood it is a principle of life which goes well beyond the purely personal. The principle of forgiveness has, indeed, in the past been applied socially with great effect in economics – something observable in the form of the King James Version of the Lord's Prayer which includes the petition,

[2] R. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word), 157.
[3] B. Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998), 280.

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mat. 6:12). This actually became the foundation for the concept of bankruptcy – the forgiveness of debt – a concept which gradually developed in its modern form in the post-reformation period as a result of a much greater general awareness of the biblical text. Previously debtors were treated purely as criminals. And even the first bankruptcy laws were designed to give more control of the situation to the one owed money (only they could initiate proceedings, appropriate property and debts could still be pursued after bankruptcy). But the injunction to forgive and related texts in Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 12-14 were applied socially which led to more humanitarian treatment of those in debt. This demonstrates how scriptural principles can influence and benefit society as a whole.

Another, relatively well known, example concerns the way in which the Christian doctrine of the *imago dei* has had a profound effect on western society's treatment of people. The Christian understanding of the person is a doctrine which has the most profound implications for the way we live and treat one another, especially the weak and defenceless, whether a new-born baby, disabled or dying person. It is *not* the case that a society or culture will naturally, or always, treat human life with reverence or that each and every culture will protect the weak. It is by no means even certain that a culture which is profoundly influenced by Christian thought will in fact do so. But a culture that lacks that influence will be greatly diminished. And it is not only Christian historians who can see this. Peter Singer agrees that it has been Christianity that brought "the distinctively Christian idea of the sanctity of all human life" which has influenced western culture and protected the weaker members of our society. However, he argues this as part of his own argument in favor of active euthanasia and optional infanticide (of any child up to the age of about 6 or 8 weeks). Singer argues that "our present absolute protection of the lives of infants is a distinctively Christian attitude rather than a universal ethical value."[4] The doctrine of the sanctity of human life is a product of Christianity and therefore, argues Singer, can be disposed of. The contribution that Christian thought made to the world cannot be taken for granted and it may need to be reasserted for the sake of the common good.

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[4] For these quotes see, respectively, Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (2nd ed.; London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), 7 ; __, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 172.

More recently the principles of grace and forgiveness have had an influence on international relationships, particularly in conjunction with the idea of the Jubilee as expressed in Leviticus 25. Christian groups, such as the three hundred evangelical Christian relief, development and justice agencies associated with the Micah Network have used the Jubilee principle to work in the global political world for fair and just conditions and the remission of unjust debt between nations. And this has borne some fruit as some debt has been remitted.

It would also be possible to go on and discuss the way that other biblical principles might affect the community. Biblical virtues or "the *fruit* of the Spirit" – so often treated purely individualistically - can be related to the present focus on the development of corporate "core values" for organisations and businesses. And if Christians are prepared to explore biblical concepts in terms of their value for the wider community as well for the inner life of the church then the biblical principles associated with the gifts of the Spirit will also be seen to have relevance for leadership in the wider community. In short, public theology is theologically integrative – relating disciplines (theology with sociology, politics, cultural analysis etc) and theory with practice. It deals with politics, workplace relations and cultural analysis and it assesses the foundations on which society is built and creates a theology of engagement in the public arena.

The growing importance of public theology is emphasized by the formation of the *Global Network for Public Theology* involving Princeton's Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology, Edinburgh University's Centre for Theology and Public Issues, the Manchester Research Institute Centre for Public Theology (Manchester University UK), Stellenbosch University (South Africa) and its Centre for Public Theology, Charles Sturt University (Australia) and the Centre for Public and Contextual Theology and the creation of a number of new journals, especially *The International Journal of Public Theology* (Brill) and the UK based *Evangelical Review of Society and Politics*. In Australia it is sufficient to note the work of the Public Theology department of the Australian Evangelical Alliance, the Tinsley Institute at Morling College, the Centre for Public Christianity and the Sophia Think Tank of the Bible Society. All of these are dealing with an issue which is as old as the church, but every age has to do the work of relating biblical principles to the current social and cultural context. The focus on "public theology" is the present response but learning from the past experiences of the

church is essential. Much of the most influential work being done at the moment comes from a broadly Reformed perspective, utilising for example, the fine work done by Abraham Kuyper. Without wanting to diminish the very positive work done there, when it is seen from a Wesleyan perspective, it is clear that there are some dimensions of current thinking which could well be developed. Despite obvious variations Christians from different traditions generally share in pretty much the same general understanding of the fundamental principles of grace, baptism, forgiveness, the image of God and so forth, and so they also share in recognizing their implications. At times, however, the differences are instructive. I would like to suggest that Wesleyan theology has considerable resources and a distinct contribution to make in this area. It is possible to draw a direct and positive theological line of connection between the "Practical Divinity" of John and Charles Wesley and the needs of public theology today. A Wesleyan contribution to public theology will include developing the implications of the following five themes.

A Wesleyan mode of theologising is essentially public

Firstly, Methodism was clearly meant to be a very public living, active movement rather than a set of ideas. This did not mean that it did not have ideas, only that they were necessarily expressed in practice. Those who understand theology to be primarily intellectual have sometimes looked down on Wesleyanism because John never wrote anything to compare, for instance, with Calvin's *Institutes*. Methodism took its deepest inspiration from John's sermons and Charles' hymns. These were Methodism's doctrinal standards along with "notes" on the New Testament, journals and tracts. But it is no weakness or theological shortcoming to have theological documents which are public, read and sung by the whole community! It is, in fact, a signal failure of theological and biblical thinking when it is possible to imply that the best form of theology is found in a systematic theology which is not applied to life. Wesleyan theology is more marked by being a "practical divinity" than by being a "systematic" or "philosophical" faith. It is this kind of public theologizing which can counter our contemporary private Christianity.

Wesleyan doctrine is understood as experiential

Closely related to this is the way that doctrine is understood as experiential. To reduce doctrine to a form of words is to misunderstand its nature. In *The Character of a Methodist* the answer to the question "Who is a Methodist?" is not given in terms of what Methodists believe, but in terms of the way they live: a Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him" which means he "does good unto all men." And these, John points out, are simply the common fundamental principles of Christianity. In this way Wesley's theology is by no means merely antiquarian, it is appropriate for today – practical, participatory, broad and engaging. The experiential nature of theology is seen in the way that Wesley deals with the doctrine of the Trinity – a doctrine often reckoned to be an abstract or philosophical construction with an unusual perspective on mathematics which makes three equal to one! This common perception is not helped by the use of philosophical terms such as those in use in the fourth century such as "persons," "hypostases," "ousias," and "essences." Understanding these is helpful and very necessary but there is no doubt that that they are initially off-putting to many people and culturally foreign, and the comprehensibility of the doctrine has suffered as a result. The problem is compounded if it is assumed that the doctrine of the Trinity can only be comprehended by understanding the right meaning of ousia, essence and person. Wesley was, of course, thoroughly Trinitarian, but what was fundamental was not the form of words – even the term 'Trinity' was not essential - it was the *experience* of God as Trinity that mattered. "I dare not insist upon any one's using the word Trinity, or Person... But I know not how any one can be a Christian believer... till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son: And, having this witness, he honours the Son, and the blessed Spirit, even as he honours the Father."[5] If we think that the doctrine of Trinity – or any part of doctrine - is entirely something of the mind and try to work it out along purely rational lines than we are altogether mistaken. Theology must be active for it to live.

Wesleyanism stresses a conjunctive approach which enhances public theology

[5] John Wesley, *On The Trinity*, Sermon 55 see http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/55/

This kind of reflection on theology as something to be lived out is well expressed by Paul Chilcote who also points to the way that Wesleyan theology joins things together, rather than polarizing them.

> For the Wesleys, theology was never meant to be either boring or irrelevant. The ultimate purpose of theology is transformation. And central to this understanding was their view that everyone is called to be a theologian...another aspect of Wesleyan theology made it particularly potent. Instead of setting aspects of the Christian faith over against each other (for example, forcing a choice between personal salvation and social action), the Wesley's tended to see matters of faith from a both/and point of view. Personal salvation, they would argue, must be held together with social action in Christian discipleship. Life in Christ, in other words, must be both personal and social. This synthetic or conjunctive approach is one of the most relevant aspects of Wesleyan theology for the contemporary church.[6]

This, incidentally, is noted by James Fowler as a prime example of a mature, "fifth stage" or "conjunctive faith" where faith and freedom, justification and justice, faith and works, evangelism and social action, private and public are all held together.[7]

The Wesleyan concept of prevenient grace provides a unique foundation for engagement with the world.

The fourth point is possibly the most important for the application of theological principles to the wider community. Prevenient grace provides the foundation for the relationship between the Christian community and the world. It means that God is at work in all parts of the world and it means that God has enabled all people to receive the offer of salvation. God has not limited his love or excluded any from the possibility of receiving grace. This grace provides a universally shared foundation and thus establishes the possibility of interaction between faith and the world. This is because there is a clear statement that God has gone before us into the world and that he is seeking there to redeem the whole world. Through prevenient grace the kingdom as a transforming presence reaches out into society, allowing for real transformation and change.

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[6] Paul Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press), 15-16.

[7] James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (San Francisco: HarperCollins), 14.

What is of critical importance at this point is that this notion of prevenient grace is significantly different to the concept of common grace used in other traditions. Common grace also speaks of God's grace at work in the world but limits its effect by excluding from it all aspects of the person of Christ and the grace of salvation. It is precisely this approach which has created problems in the past separating, for example, evangelism and social action. It also engenders a greater limitation on the possible outcomes of Christian ministry in the wider world. Prevenient grace, however, is an aspect of salvation rather than simply of creation. It is Christologically orientated, grounded in Christ and the Spirit, and can therefore have a greater degree of optimism concerning the possibility of change. The Wesleyan notion of sanctification as faith working through love creates a view of holiness which is indivisibly personal and social and containing potential for elaboration in a public context.

Wesleyan theology encourages social holiness

Historically speaking, Wesley and his followers refused to participate in the theological silence concerning the social injustices and brutalities of the Industrial Revolution. Many Christians actually had an economic stake in the establishment of the day. There was a marked contrast in the way that the early Methodist appeal was precisely to miners, workers and their families. The social dimension of sin was recognised. But so too was the social dimension of holiness. In the introduction to the first volume of the Methodist Hymn book Wesley affirmed that "the gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and height of Christian perfection." Note that this was in the introduction to hymns which are, by their nature, best sung – and lived – corporately. The transformation of the person was an essential dimension of social transformation. Holiness is not something that relates to the individual in isolation but to the person in community. The Wesleyan notion of sanctification as "faith working through love" created a view of holiness which is indivisibly personal and social, and this has continuing potential for further elaboration in our world. The concept of Christian perfection is a well-known Wesleyan distinctive. It is one of the strengths of Wesleyan theology and could well contribute positively towards a better understanding of the church's relationship with society.

Conclusion

These five points merely provide a summary indication of some aspects of Wesleyan theology which have the potential to contribute positively towards a better understanding of the church's relationship with society. Wesleyan observations on free-will, the role of evangelism and other specific areas of life such as economics and globalisation also have great potential for making an on-going contribution to contemporary public theology.

BEYOND THE VIOLENT GOD?: A PRIMER ON GIRARD[1]

Jonathan P. Case

Many people object to monotheistic religions on the basis that they have enshrined violence in their core narratives. This is felt to be a particular difficulty for Christianity especially when the death of Jesus is understood as a penal substitution for sin. Renee Girard's theory of "mimetic rivalry" provides an alternative way of reading the death and resurrection of Jesus. The cross becomes a necessity not because God's wrath must be placated by Christ's suffering but because it unmasks the myth of sacred violence and reveals the human desire and propensity towards killing as a form of scapegoating. The resurrection signals a new way of dealing with rivalry, a Spirit greater than the power of violence. A number of criticisms of Girard are noted but a positive appropriation of some of his key insights is recommended.

Violence, Society and Religion

Many of my students would recognise a recurring event on the popular television show, *South Park*. Kenny McCormick, the little boy whose voice is always muffled as he attempts to talk through his parka, gets killed in every episode. Sometimes his death seems relevant to the plot, other times it seems wholly *ir*relevant to what's going on. But it always happens. *South Park* is an extremely offensive satire, and I'm not encouraging anyone to watch it, but the creators of the show have perhaps unwittingly put their finger on one of the most perplexing questions confronting human beings: is violence inherent in the basic fabric or make-up of human society? No matter what happens in a *South Park* episode, one of the show's constants remains: little defenceless Kenny will be killed.

The previous century was unparalleled in barbarity. In George Steiner's characterisation, "for the whole of Europe and Russia," the twentieth century "became a time out of hell." And lest we think that the second world war happened oh-so-long ago, thirty years or so after Auschwitz the Khmer Rouge alone buried alive an estimated hundred thousand beings. In sum, Steiner reminds us, "Historians

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[1] This paper was delivered as the Chamberlain Lecture in Mission at Houghton College, New York.

estimate at more than seventy million the number of men, women and children done to death by warfare, starvation, deportation, political murder and disease between 1914 and the 'ethnic cleansing' in the Balkans."[2]

Surveying the carnage and ideologies of the last century, many people today worry that a causal connection exists between religion and violence, that "true believers" of all persuasions are potential goose-stepping fanatics or balaclava-wearing terrorists. This attitude typifies not only academics; it's a popular attitude. In an interview a few years ago, musician and songwriter Michael Franti was discussing his spiritual evolution, and he made the comment that, even though he was raised Lutheran, he no longer wanted to claim that tradition. Franti voiced the sentiment of many people today when he said: "I'm not a big fan of organised religion. Too much violence. We don't need missionaries, because God is omnipresent, and people will come to God based on the context of where they live."[3]

Unfortunately, evidence abounds to support this connection between religion and violence. In the popular imagination, monotheistic religious traditions come in for the heaviest criticism. Of course recently Islam has taken it hardest on the chin, and its case is not helped by the more militant expressions we read about almost every day. When a few years ago the Melbourne newspaper *The Herald Sun* ran a story on the Australian wife of a suspected terrorist, she was quoted as saying: "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter...I may get into trouble saying that...but...I agree with it. For Muslims, the jihad is compulsory. It is...the struggle for God."[4] Regardless of the protests launched by the majority of peaceful Muslims in the West, the grassroots imagination tends to latch onto these kinds of highly publicised expressions.

And while you might think that the shadow of the *Shoah* has stretched long enough to warn anyone off accusing the Jews of practising a faith intrinsically violent, the sad fact is that the barrage of reports from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict only help to confirm in the minds of many the suspicion that religion keeps *both* sides

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[2] George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 3-4.
[3] Mark LeVine, "Enrage, Enlighten, Inspire" [interview with Michael Franti], at http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2000/08/Enrage-Enlighten-Inspire.aspx Accessed 30 November 2008.
[4] Ben English, "Terror Suspect's Wife Backs Jihad," *Herald Sun* Thursday Feb 5, 2004, p5.

locked in an endless struggle. You may remember several years ago what a field day the media had with Baruch Goldstein's murder of twenty-nine Muslims at prayer at the tomb of Abraham. Rabbi Arthur Waskow of *The Shalom Center* in Philadelphia sums the matter up this way: "Mention 'the Jews' and 'non-violence' in our generation, and many will look you at you askance. Mental images of the Israeli army, the Maccabees, an 'angry God' will flood the eye."[5]

Christianity doesn't come off any better in this regard, and perhaps worse. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the Thirty Years War, the history of missionary activity often linked with political or commercial interest, as well as deplorable attitudes and practices towards women and people of colour (slavery, etc) all are brought forward by our critics as evidence that Christianity irremediably inclines itself towards violence.

The Trouble with Monotheisms?

Some have argued that part of the problem must be traced to the concept of monotheism itself. Regina Schwartz , for example, in her book *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* says that one of the problems with monotheism can be seen in that, "the demand of allegiance to one principle, or one god, is accompanied by aggression to those who have other allegiances." Unfortunately, says Schwartz, the injunction "thou shalt have no other gods before me" turns into intolerance for other people who may have other gods, principles or beliefs."[6] Furthermore, she argues that this legacy of monotheism from the Hebrew Bible in particular has so deeply imprinted western culture that it has actually fed the violent nationalisms of our day.

Regardless of any observations you might make about monotheism in particular, the conclusion we've drawn in the West about violence and religion in general is that for public safety's sake religion ought to be kept out of the public square and relegated to the realm of personal convictions or values. So you read about, for

[5] Arthur Wasko, "Judaism, Violence and Non Violence," *Fellowship* May/June 2003, at http://www.forusa.org/fellowship/may-june_03/waskow.html Accessed 30 November 2008.

[6] Interview with Regina M. Schwartz at http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/741990.html Accessed 30 November 2008.

example, the French government's attempts to prohibit Muslim women from wearing the hijab in public and the public display of large religious symbols.[7]

When people attempt to defend one of the monotheistic faiths I mentioned above, usually such attempts try to separate what you might call the "official" beliefs of a religion (what's "on the books") from erroneous interpretations and the actual behaviour of believers. So Muslims will point to the passage in the *Qur'an* that says when one person murders another, it's as though that person murders all of humanity. Or Jews and Christians point to passages in their Scriptures that enjoin us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Such attempts to salvage religion by appealing to ethical ideals fall increasingly on deaf ears. It's not the existence of ethical ideals that anyone questions, but whether the character of God said to be revealed in each of these religions does not finally trump the putative morality each one champions, and whether the character of God ineluctably orients the "true believer" to violence as part and parcel of the faith. The concept of monotheism *per se* does not present the problem so much as the character of the one *theos* claimed.

Consider some foundational events in each of the faiths I've mentioned: In Judaism, many would cite the slaughter of the Egyptian infant boys on the first Passover and the violent (some would say genocidal) conquest of "the Promised land." And many believers would not hesitate to defend, theologically, such events. In a web forum discussion I follow, when this issue was tossed around, one of the participants offered this:

> As for the conquest of Canaan, does this justify genocide under certain circumstances? Absolutely, as long as those circumstances are "God commands it"...that flows naturally from my belief in God as the

[7] Interestingly, in the present cultural climate in the West interest in Eastern religions escapes this kind of criticism and is even encouraged. Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism are all thought to be more passive, tranquil, concerned with finding one's center, and above all non-dogmatic – hence more desirable in fast-paced and multi-cultural societies in which people want a "faith" that is essentially therapeutic and at the same time tolerant. You have your spiritual bliss – I have mine. I recently was watching a television show about holiday destinations in southeast Asia, and the narrator mentioned that in a certain Asian country the tourist looking for peace of mind should try meditating at such and such temple (and there was our indefatigable TV tour guide, sitting in lotus position in a temple). I doubt you would ever see such "tourist religion" promoted where someone with no particular religious affiliation would be encouraged to join the faithful as they worshipped in a synagogue, church or mosque.

> ultimate authority in all things. The Bible tells us that the genocide was not a result of the Israelite's need for land, but rather a punishment for the conquered nations' unbelief.[8]

Our contemporary critics fear these sorts of comments. "True believers" confess that their God commanded genocide in the past; what if God does so again? Consider Islam for a moment. Critics have asked: Isn't violence found at the origins of this faith, when you consider the foundational battles on the Arabian Peninsula that led to Muhammad's triumph and the formation of the earliest Muslim community, battles which, according to the *Qur'an*, God himself urged the Prophet and the faithful to fight?[9] Doesn't *Shia* Islam especially have violence at its beginning, in the murder of Husayn, grandson of the Prophet in 680? "No wonder Muslims are so violent," we say, "look at the origins of their faith." Both Jews and Christians, as well as our secular critics, like to draw attention to those signal events.

The Cross of Jesus and the Violence of God

But we have a serious challenge of our own in this area, and that problem has to do, of course, with the death of Jesus and the meanings that Christians have attached to it in our attempt to articulate a doctrine of the atonement. In other words, *a killing, a murder* occupies the heart of our faith, a murder that God is said to have required for God's own sake, in order for God's own honour to be satisfied and for God's justice to be expressed.

According to the most popular rendering of the atonement, our sins have violated the divine moral requirement for humanity - we have broken God's law - which attracts divine wrath. God cannot simply forgive (that would be mercy without justice). Righteous judgment - the death penalty! - must be carried out if God is to be true to God's own righteous nature. Yet in the depths of divine mercy God has provided a way out of this, our dilemma, by setting forth a substitute who can take upon himself our deserved punishment, our deserved death. But who can take upon himself the sin of the whole world, of all of humanity? Only the innocent and obedient son of God himself, the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

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[8] Discussion at http://www.evangelicaloutpost.com/archives/000277.html
[9] *Surah* 8: 65

The Levitical law prefigures this perfect sacrifice in its command to sacrifice animals, for, as we are told, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Yet Yahweh in the Old Testament apparently "can't get no satisfaction;" these sacrifices are insufficient to cover the debt we owe. They are only the shadow of what is to come, according to the author of Hebrews, put in place until the perfect sacrifice.

This is more or less the understanding of the atonement I grew up with, and I suspect it functions as the default understanding of most evangelicals. The "penal substitution theory" in this form owes much to the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, although its roots go back to the satisfaction theory of the atonement developed by Anselm of Canterbury. In recent years this theory has been the target of much criticism, by believers and nonbelievers alike, and I think we should at least listen to some of these criticisms, if for no other reason than we might then be pressed to articulate in a clearer fashion the saving significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Before I go further, I want to remind you that a theological *theory*, a theory of the atonement, doesn't *save* anyone. In fact for the first thousand years or so in the church the *Christus Victor* model (Christ the triumphant victor over the power of the devil and death) would have provided the dominant paradigm for understanding the saving significance of Jesus' death. So please remember: I am not questioning that Jesus' death saves, only a popular theory of *how* his death is said to save. And in connection to this disclaimer, remember that none of the great ecumenical creeds of the church hitches its wagon to a particular theory of the atonement.

Let me unpack a bit more of this criticism of Christianity and its supposed intrinsic violence. Several years ago in the popular comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, eight-year old Calvin was pretending that he was God, but, we were told, the trouble is that he's no kind and loving god, rather: *he's one of the old gods; he demands sacrifice!* With the traditional penal substitution theory of the atonement, it sounds to some people like Christians are saying that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is one more species of the "old gods" who were always thirsty, and there's nothing that slakes the thirst of a grumpy god like a good old-fashioned draught of human blood.

The blood of bulls and goats was not enough; this god had to get the biggest payout possible to cover the debt we owed him, which he got with the blood of Jesus. Our critics will tell us: "You can talk all

you want about the mercy and love of God, but what you're really telling us is that your "God" needed to have a killing in order to be loving. Like a thousand other garden-variety gods since the dawn of time, your God needs a murder in order to forgive." As one of the characters in R. F. Laird's masterpiece, *The Boomer Bible*, puts it: Yahweh is the kind of God that gives gods in general a bad name; he is "the most capriciously wrathful and destructive god in the whole history of life on earth."[10]

Some feminist theologians have also chimed in with the criticism, claiming that implications are worse than we imagine. God's sacrifice of his own innocent son constitutes "divine child abuse." The offended and angry father who cannot suppress his wrath must "vent", must find a target: so poor Jesus. If this orients our understanding of divine fatherhood, then, we are told, we should not be surprised if some people draw tragic and predictably violent conclusions for their own children.

Thus the ethical objection: "In a world so riddled with religious violence, so chock full of religious fanatics and suicide bombers who don't hesitate to kill in the name of God, why should we want to have anything to do with Christianity, which seems to have violence ordered by the very loving God it proclaims, so he, like the gods of old, can be placated! Isn't *that* God exactly the kind of deity we have outgrown and can do without? Wouldn't a God that demands blood necessarily orient his followers towards, if not outright violence, then at least a life of suffering and sacrifice carried out in his name? Who needs that kind of God?" At a *ReImagining* Conference a few years back Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary no doubt summed up the contemporary attitude of many when she was heard to remark: "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."[11]

Like most theologians, contemporary biblical scholars and theologians in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition have been quick to distance themselves from any reading of the atonement suggesting that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ might be related to one of the "old gods." God does not need to be placated or reconciled; *we* need to be reconciled;[12] God's wrath is not

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[10] R.F.Laird, *The Boomer Bible* (NY: Workman, 1991); *Boulevardiers* 13: 3; 15: 11.
[11] Williams' words have been cited in many publications. Cf. "The WCC Solidarity with Women Minneapolis Conference," BRF Witness 29 no. 3 May/June 1994 http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1994v29n3.htm Accessed 30 November 2008.
[12] Cf., e.g., treatments in H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988) and J Kenneth Grider, *A*

retributive,[13] and so on. But the fundamental question, "Does God require the sacrifice, the murder, of an innocent in order to be forgiving?" goes begging.

While teaching in the Russian Federation a few years ago, a student came up to me after a lecture on the atonement. He mentioned a leading contemporary Wesleyan systematic theologian whom he had read, and said to me point blank: "This man just doesn't understand the problems associated with traditional renderings of atonement, does he? When we Russians hear the word 'sacrifice' you don't realise what that word means to us. The Soviet government demanded that we sacrifice nearly everything to their ideology. Is God like that?"

If you try explaining to someone like this that human sin, not divine blood-lust, made the death of Jesus necessary in view of divine righteousness, then this simply pushes the question back one step further. Because now it appears you're saying that God wouldn't ordinarily desire the sacrifice of the innocent, but the contingency of human sin violating divine righteousness requires it. If that divine righteousness is not a standard external to God, but is an expression of God's own character in response to human sin, then, yes, God still does require a killing in order to be forgiving. God "doesn't have it in him" otherwise.

So is violence inscribed not only at the heart of human society but in God's own heart as well? The *South Park* boys accuse Kenny's killers "You killed Kenny!" Would we be similarly justified in saying: "God killed Jesus!"? God *had to* kill Jesus? Because God had to punish *somebody*?" Stephen Travis (St John's College, Nottingham) tells the story of a woman at a theology conference, who'd been trying to piece together what she had been learning about Jesus' death, coming up to him and asking quizzically, "So Jesus came to save us from God?"[14]

I wonder if we are not helped by going back to Delores Williams' comments and asking: Who *does* need "folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff?" Who *does* need the violence?

Wesleyan-Holiness Theology (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994).

[13] Cf. Joel Green and Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

[14] Stephen H. Travis, "The Doctrine of the Atonement: Popular Evangelicalism and the Bible," at http://catalystresources.org/issues/221travis.html Accessed 30 November 2008.

René Girard: Mimesis and Scapegoating

In grappling with this question, many theologians have been drawn to the seminal work of René Girard, professor emeritus of literature at Stanford University. Girard has made famous his theory of "mimetic rivalry" and the "scapegoating mechanism," and a host of theologians and biblical scholars in recent years have turned to his theories for the light they shed on the question of the violence of God in the Scriptures, especially as it pertains to rendering the meaning of Jesus' death. In general, Girard's theory has been used to explain the religious character of the violent origins at the basis or founding of various cultures: how do you account for myths of sacred murder or sacrifice at the beginnings of a people's cultural history?

A. Basic elements in Girard's theory

Girard claims that, far from being apparent, the real origin of this sacred violence must be uncovered, and further, sought anthropologically. Its starting point lies in understanding desire, and the fact that human desire is inflamed by the desire of another. We come to imitate the desire we see in others: this sums up the root of Girard's theory of *mimesis*, or *mimetic* desire. We learn to *mime* the desire of others.

We see it in the ancient story of our origins: "You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of the fruit your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." And the light comes on: when the woman suddenly saw that the fruit was good for food and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some, ate it and gave it to her husband. Putting the matter in this light should not be surprising to Christians; there is a long tradition in the history of Christian thought that holds the essence of sin to be "concupiscence" or disordered desire: desiring for ourselves what God does *not* desire for us. (I suppose the origins for advertising, of how to inflame other's desire, also lie in Genesis 3.)

The phenomenon can be observed in the everyday experience of any parent: watch children in a nursery all desiring a toy that one child prizes. Even if you put an identical toy into the nursery, the particular toy favoured by that one child will often remain the toy desired by others. If you want to sharpen the romantic attraction you hope that "special someone" for you, let them see you with

someone else and the needle of their "desire meter" will "redline" over you.

Marketing experts count on this phenomenon of mimetic desire: get the word out on the most viewed website, the CD that everyone wants, and so on. These experts hope that everyone else's desire will inflame yours. When one person casts the "acquisitive gesture," as Girard puts it, others are sure to follow. If the stakes are high enough, if enough wealth or sex or power is involved, a deadly game of competition and rivalry ensues.

Harry is the cocaine-sniffing, egotistical Messiah for our age in Laird's *Boomer Bible*. He comes preaching the great trinity of Desire, Certainty and Blame. Harry says that the first great beacon of the way, *Desire*, means that you should "act in accordance with your desires and do not trouble yourself with thoughts about whether you deserve it or not or who might be hurt by you having it or any chain of events that might be set in motion by your desire. None of these matter at all..."[15]

The second great beacon, *Certainty*, means that in all matters and circumstances you choose the way of certainty, because people who are certain have "no need to think and are not troubled by conscience or the responsibility to weigh things further or look for concealed relationships."[16] Hear the word of Harry. Certainty keeps your desires unwavering in their competition with others: when you are certain of what you want, never back down for anyone.

Girard says that as the tension and rivalry between people inflamed with out-of-control desires escalates and eventually reaches a boiling point, society threatens to devour itself and collapse into chaos. But then, inevitably, a person or minority group of persons are singled out as the cause of the trouble and breakdown. And people who were previously cutthroat competitors and deadly rivals suddenly find themselves united, *friends*, as they cast blame - what Girard calls the "accusative gesture" - on a single victim, whom all agree must be expelled or liquidated for the greater good of society.

After the scapegoat is expelled or killed, relative order and peacefulness returns to the community until the next round of mimetic rivalry reaches a boiling point and the scapegoating mechanism kicks in again. The scapegoating system self-perpetuates and self-regulates.

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[15] Laird, *Boomer Bible*, cf. Willie 32: 1-8
[15]Laird, *Boomer Bible*, cf. Willie 33: 1-4

Given our recent history, we probably think most naturally of the Jews under National Socialism in Germany, or more recent ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or genocidal madness in Africa. But Girard emphasises that the madness, what he calls the "contagion," of mimetic rivalry and the scapegoating mechanism has been the constant and enduring feature of human society. Robert Hamerton-Kelly comments that the first social moment of our species was "the fellowship of the lynch mob."[17]

The corporation teeters on the brink: sack the CEO. The team bows out of the cup competition: axe the manager. The church struggles to grow: off with the pastor's head. The denomination staggers through a rough patch: it's time for a bloodletting, so we'll target all those liberals or lousy college or seminary faculties that aren't training our ministers properly. The family comes apart at the seams: it must be the influence of that ratty no-good son or daughter. We can't get what we want, and it *must* be someone else's fault, so they must pay for it!

Again the voice of the messiah from *The Boomer Bible*: The third great beacon of the way is *Blame*. Harry says, "When you're unhappy or dissatisfied for any reason, find someone else to blame, because people who have someone to blame have no reason to question themselves. So be fearless about pointing the finger at others, and be sure to choose the targets for your blame in accordance with your desires."[18]

For a time, remarkably, the scapegoat mechanism works: Calmness and order are restored. And cultures since the dawn of time have said: "Surely this miracle of peace can mean only one thing. The gods must have wanted so-and-so to be sacrificed. So-and-so must have been under a divine curse, they really had it coming; they could not have been innocent and therefore we were justified in expelling and killing them. The gods wanted them killed." And so, Girard says, the real origins for human violence, the frenzy of our own collective twisted desire, have been given a religious justification or mythological overlay. The real origins remain hidden from us, and human beings remain trapped within this spiral of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating. We are both bound

[17] Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "Violence and Religion," http://www.hamerton-kelly.com/talks/violence_religion_jan03.htm Accessed 30 November 2008.
[18] Laird, op. cit., cf. Willie 34: 1-8

to the forces and consequences of our own rampant desire and blind to our situation. We are held captive to a power over us.

In Girardian terms, the power of the *devil* can be found precisely in what the Bible says about him. The "*satan*" means "the *accuser*," revealed in the power of accusation and the contagion, in the power of blaming and liquidating whomever is thought to be the cause of the community's trouble, while the actual cause should be traced to our own competing desires. Satan acts as the motivating force of the "contagion," the madness of desire that spreads throughout human relationships and community. Then, at just the crucial moment, "Satan casts out Satan." In other words, right before the community explodes, the victim is expelled or eliminated and the contagion dissipates for the time being, but the real cause of the violence remains hidden, and the process starts all over again.[19]

So when Jesus asks, "How can Satan cast out Satan?," Girard says he's not being obscure or rhetorical. Jesus is provoking us to reflect on how the accuser manages to capitalise on our desire, bring forth the destructive consequence, and at the same time cast himself out without being detected, so the cycle of desire, rivalry and violence is repeated over and over again, while we're kept trapped and in the dark. The overlay of the religious rhetoric of sacred violence, of God needing and desiring the killing, puts the crowning touch on the camouflage.

The violence itself unleashed in this scapegoat mechanism seems to generate a charismatic quality of its own. Bernd Weisbrod observes that whatever murderous ideologies certain leaders or parties have held, the killing itself carried out provides a kind of charismatic proof as to the sacred calling of the movement.[20] Killing and even mutilating the body of one's enemy is the ultimate demarcation of "us" versus "them." Michael Ley notes that for many contemporary totalitarian movements aspiring to bring about a Gnostic-apocalyptic vision of the final restoration of a holy cosmic order, present social redemption can be achieved only through the

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[19] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001). See especially James G. Williams' foreword, xii.

[20] Bernd Weisbrod, "Fundamentalist Violence: Political Violence and Political Religion in Modern Conflict," at http://www.afsp.msh-paris.fr/archives/2001/violencestxt/weisbrod.pdf Accessed 30 November 2008.

annihilation of all political opponents. The killing of people thus becomes "a sacred ritual in the process of salvation."[21]

The Bible's unique function, Girard claims, lies in its ability to debunk mythologies ancient and modern insofar as it reveals the cycle of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating by recounting stories from the perspective of what he calls "the intelligence of the victim." So, for example, the story of Joseph reveals an innocent victim scapegoated once his brothers' rivalry reaches a fever pitch, and innocently imprisoned after the incident in Potiphar's house. This is in contrast to, for example, Oedipus, who suffers the wholly understandable consequences of being under a divine curse. To those critics of Christianity who consider the biblical stories just another collection of ancient myths exalting sacred violence, Girard says that, if we read carefully, we will discern a profoundly "anti-mythological inspiration."[22]

The Psalms and the book of Job, Girard says, are perhaps some of the oldest texts in the world in which we hear the voice of the victim, and an appeal to the "God of the victim."[23] In fact, Girard argues that western civilization owes the very notion of humanitarian concern for the "victim" to the biblical stories and the perspective they enjoin upon us.

B. Girardian analysis and the story of Jesus

The application of this theory to interpreting the death of Jesus can be easily sketched out. Jesus dies as a result of a bubbling cauldron of human mimetic rivalry. Jesus came announcing the coming kingdom of God, calling for repentance, pronouncing the forgiveness of sins, welcoming the outcasts and marginalised, healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and we would not have it.

Such ideas and activities are dangerous. They fuel zealot expectation, they provoke Roman anxiety over ideas of kingship, allegiance and social order, and they threaten a certain set of religious ideals and authorities that benefit from them: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and then the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation." And from Caiphas, the cold voice of *realpolitick*: "You know nothing at

[21] Michael Ley, "Holy Violence in the Modern Age," http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/events/innsbruck2003_Ley_Paper.doc Accessed 30 November 2008.
[22] Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 110.
[23] Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 117ff.

all!" In other words: Don't you know how the real world works? In the world of guns and trumpets, "better that one man should die than have the whole nation perish." (John 11.48-50).

When Jesus is arrested, he says to those who have come for him: "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Everyday I was with you in the Temple courts..." (Lk 22.53) In other words: "you know what I've been on about!" But to the accusers, the scapegoat must be made out to be evil and dangerous. And Luke writes that on the day when Pilate and Herod saw that it would be to their mutual advantage to get rid of this troublemaker, what happened? "They became friends" (23.12), whereas before they had been enemies. The accusative gesture unites previous rivals. On this account, note that *we* become the vessels of God's wrath as the deadly fruit of our disordered desire is borne. In other words, God does not hurl down invisible quantities of wrath on his suffering Son because he just *has* to punish somebody for what we've done and balance the scales of justice in the heavens.

What actually happens in a straightforward reading of the Gospel story? *Human beings* kill Jesus. As the Apostle Paul says, God's wrath is revealed precisely as *we* are delivered over, as we are "given up" or abandoned, to the full consequences of *our* sin (or, in Girardian terms, as our murderous desire is allowed to run its lethal course). And Jesus dies as a result of that. Gerhard Forde puts it this way: "God rejects and judges [our sin] by refusing to have anything to do with it."[24] In other words, Jesus does not call for vengeance, for legions of the angelic cavalry to arrive in the nick of time at Calvary. And he does not suffer for the sins of the world in some abstract, metaphysical sense. He literally bears our sin physically, in his body: the lash, the thorns, the nails, the spear.

Astonishingly, the gospel narratives reveal this man to be the Christ of God, and declare his innocence. In Matthew's account, the centurion and the guard exclaim, right at the moment of Jesus' death: "surely this was a son of the gods" (Mt 28.54). In Luke's account, the centurion praises God, saying, "surely this was a righteous man" (Lk 23. 47). And the Gospel reveals that the stone the builders rejected, as all the previous envoys of the vineyard owner had been killed, was indeed the stone that was destined to become head of the corner.

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[24] Gerhard Forde, "The Work of Christ," in Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* Volume 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 91. The present analysis is deeply indebted to Forde.

Now proof of the providential and gracious character of this event lies in the fact that it reveals to us what we could never have found out about our condition. To use Pascal's words: the real truth of our condition lies farthest from our ken; it must be revealed. The story of Jesus' crucifixion told in the Gospel blows the lid off the myth of sacred violence and reveals the real reason for it: our desire for it, our propensity towards killing.

And it remains our plight, not merely that of a group of people back in the first century. Girard says, "Because of the simple fact that we live in a world whose structure is based on mimetic processes and victim mechanisms, from which we all profit without knowing it, we are *all* accessories to the Crucifixion [and] persecutors of Christ."[25] In the words of Luther: we all carry around in our pockets the nails used to crucify Jesus.

To respond to Delores Williams' comment: Who needs "folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff"? *We do! We* have needed it since the dawn of time! And the Gospel reveals that to us! Jesus made a public spectacle of the powers and their strategy that binds us in a cycle of violence and death (Col. 2.15). His death on the cross, as recounted in the Gospel, reveals the contagion and scapegoat mechanism that holds us in bondage and prevents us from recognising our plight.

Theologians of the ancient church such as Origen spoke of God duping Satan, or fooling him in the death of Jesus on the cross and triumphing over him in the resurrection. As I mentioned earlier, this is called the *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement ("Christ the Victor"). No doubt more people will remember C.S. Lewis' depiction of atonement when Aslan fools and triumphs over the evil Queen, in *Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis was simply repackaging the *Christ the Victor* theme for a twentieth century audience: Aslan counters the deep magic by recourse to an even deeper magic, an even more ancient law. The Queen takes the bait, is hooked, and then is "done for."

You could say that Girard explains a bit of how that "magic" works so the Queen's reign is overturned. By nailing Christ to the cross, the powers believed they were doing what they ordinarily did in unleashing the scapegoat mechanism, and avoiding being seen. They never suspected that in the end they would be contributing to their own annihilation.[26]

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[25] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 191.
[26] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 142.

To put it another way, Girard says...

> in triggering the victim mechanism against Jesus, Satan believed that he was protecting his kingdom –not realising that he was doing the very opposite. He did exactly what God had foreseen. Only Satan could have set in motion the process of his own destruction without suspecting anything was wrong.[27]

By depriving the scapegoat mechanism of the darkness that conceals it so it can continue to control us, the light of the cross deprives Satan of his principal power, the power to dispel his own contagion. "Once the cross completely illuminates this dark Sun," Girard says, "Satan is no longer able to limit his capacity for destruction. Satan will destroy his kingdom, and he will destroy himself."[28]

Some have criticised Girard's reading of the cross, accusing him of saying, in effect, that once we have our problem revealed to us (viz., our sinful desire, our propensity for violence and so on), then it no longer retains any power over us.[29] As though realising the problem amounts to having the solution! Girard himself rejects this criticism explicitly. "We should not conclude," he says, "that to identify the truth is enough to liberate us from the lie in which we are all imprisoned."[30]

Identifying the truth is not enough. We need the power of the resurrection. Girard says we make a mistake if we see the resurrection simply as a miracle that God performs, as a transgression of what we think of as "natural laws." In fact such a reading is really a trivialising of the resurrection. The resurrection is nothing less than "the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of *a power far superior* to violent contagion."[31] This power of the resurrection is none other than the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God that possesses us and does not let us go.

Of the various names belonging to the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel, *Paraclete* means "lawyer or defender for the accused." The birth of Christianity, Girard says, must be seen as the "victory of the Paraclete over his opposite, Satan" ("the accuser"). What does that

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[27] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 151.
[28] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 142.
[29] See, e.g., William Placher, "Christ Takes Our Place: Rethinking Atonement," *Interpretation* 53 (1999): 5-20.
[30] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 151.
[31] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 189.

victory look like in the life of a believer? Consider the change in Peter from his realisation that he too has participated in the betrayal of Jesus to his speaking to the Jerusalem crowd some days after the resurrection. Or consider Saul of Tarsus, the violent man seeking to destroy the church of God, before and after his Damascus Road experience, when Jesus told him: you are actually persecuting me. The Spirit of the resurrected Jesus, Girard says, "empowers Peter and Paul, as well as all believers after them, to understand that all imprisonment in sacred violence is done *to Christ*. Humankind is never the victim of God; God is always the victim of humankind."[32]

Criticisms of Girard

By way of a summary analysis, it seems to me that Girard's rendering of the death of Jesus has much to commend it, especially as we think about some of the legitimate questions that have been raised in our time about the relationship between religion and violence. By saying this, however, I do not mean to imply that Girard's theory should not be thoroughly scrutinised, or that it escapes serious criticisms.

Girard is frequently criticized, for example, for supposedly superimposing his anthropological theory of mimesis and scapegoating over the biblical text in such a manner that the text merely becomes an hermeneutical occasion to display his theory. Girard explicitly rejects this accusation and says, to the contrary, that we could never see the mimetic cycle and scapegoating mechanism except for the Bible and the stories it narrates. Only in its light has it been possible for people to discern how human cultures attempt to cover and legitimate violence with layers of mythology.

Another frequent criticism charges Girard with recommending an understanding of sacrifice and scapegoating that, although seeming to fit well with the interpersonal human drama recounted in the Gospel accounts, is at odds with the understanding of sacrifice in Pauline literature and other parts of the New Testament. Paul and, for example, the writer of Hebrews (so the critique goes) appear to hold to a fairly conventional understanding of sacrifice in which the death of Jesus propitiates God, while Girard appears to promise a hermeneutical key to understanding the death of Jesus that enables us to interpret the sacrifice of Jesus clearly across the grain

[32] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 191.

or against the direction of these texts. Girard has given us, in other words, a critique of sacred violence that some of the biblical writers themselves erroneously share. So his theories of mimesis and scapegoating function as a kind of gnosis that enable us to grasp the deeper meaning of what is really going on in the death of Jesus, even though some of the biblical writers appear to be unaware of it. Their texts need to be liberated via Girardian analysis.

A corollary of the above critique is that Girard operates with a one-sided or reductive view of sacrifice, while sacrifice functions in many different ways in the Bible. He admittedly calls his theory an anthropological theory. Is it possible, then, to offer a specifically *theological* theory of sacrifice?[33] Or is such an understanding doomed from the start on account of any necessary connection between the sacred and violence?

While these criticisms are potent, Girard's theory still deserves serious consideration on account of the following reasons: To begin, Girard's rendering places the problem where it belongs. The problem the doctrine of atonement addresses is not the fact that God has a problem: he's angry at human sin and has to find some way to "vent" and balance the metaphysical scales of justice somewhere in the heavens. Again, God does not have to be reconciled or placated. We have the problem; we need to be reconciled. And this interpretation of Jesus' death at least attempts to spell out clearly how we are reconciled. Far from relying on a secret pact of satisfaction needed between Father and Son, this rendering specifies the dynamics of disordered desire that at once makes us rivals of God and functions as the fuel of rivalry and propensity for violence that issues finally in the scapegoating of the innocent.

Secondly, Girard challenges an inadequate and misleading image of God that sometimes emerges when an angry Father of the Old Testament squares off against the loving son of Mary mild in the New Testament. *The Boomer Bible* says that the traditional rendering of the Father-Son connection is pretty much a "good guy – bad guy shtick, with Christ playing the good guy, talking about mercy and redemption... and God [the Father] playing the heavy, with his great big list of mortal sins and inexpiable guilts and everlasting damnation."[34] Girard helps us say, "No, God is not one

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[33] For such an attempt, see Eberhard Jüngel, "The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ as Sacrament and Example", in *Theological Essays II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 163-190.

[34] Laird, *Boomer Bible*, "Boulevardiers," 15: 2-4.

of Calvin's 'old gods' before the cross, a kind of bloodthirsty Mr Hyde who suddenly changes into a Dr Jekyll of light and love after Jesus placates his anger." The crucifixion, as Robert Jenson puts it, is what it cost the Father *to be* the loving and merciful Father.[35]

Thirdly, this interpretation throws into sharp relief the gravity and hypocrisy of *un*-forgiveness among the people of God. What's one of the most common criticisms you hear directed at the church by non-believers? "You people blather on and on about love and forgiveness but when push comes to shove, when it comes to getting your own way, you're all just as bloody-minded as anyone else." If Girard is right then participating in longstanding feuds, vicious rivalries and even scapegoating within the body of Christ perpetuates the very contagion Christ came to end. If anything, an understanding of his death in relation to mimetic rivalry and scapegoating should be an impetus to the church to speak against sacred violence wherever it occurs and to promote reconciliation. The risen Christ says "peace be with you" precisely to those who betrayed him and fled. This work of reconciliation may not be a popular position. I'm reminded of Jesus' words to his disciples: the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are doing a *divine service*; in other words, they will believe that God requires and is pleased with your murder.

Finally, this interpretation insists that resurrection has an essential place in understanding atonement. Many theologians have pointed out that, on the penal substitution and satisfaction model, Christ's resurrection seems to have a rather tenuous connection. Divine punishment needs to be rendered, the satisfaction of divine justice must be met, and that all hinges on the obedience of Christ even to death on the cross. But the function of the resurrection remains unclear. In this alternative model I've been describing, a form of the *Christus Victor* model, no reconciliation exists apart from resurrection. In light of that event the powers are exposed on the cross, and the Paraclete, the Spirit of the resurrected Jesus, calls us to a new community.

How then, should we respond to those who say: "Why would we want to have anything to do with this so-called God of love you proclaim? Doesn't the death of Jesus enshrine violence right at the heart of the Christian faith?" If we follow Girard's take on the Gospel, we can say: "Of course! But the Gospel reveals the problem

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[35] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Volume 1: The Triune God* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 191.

–the perverted desire, the rivalry, the scapegoating— to be ours, not God's. We should not, like the boys on *South Park*, look at the murder of the innocent Jesus and exclaim to God: "You killed Jesus!" Rather, the finger of blame should point where it belongs; we should confess, "We killed Jesus!" The good news is that the curse, the contagion, has been exposed and broken for us on his cross, and through God's Holy Spirit we are reconciled, called and empowered to live as a new people.

JESUS, THE INCARNATION AND HOLY LIVING

Alan Harley

The holiness of God is revealed fully in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This has significant implications for the sanctification of believers as it tells us that God has affirmed a positive attitude toward the material creation. Christ is "God with us" opening up the possibility of human holiness through contact with God's own holiness by the Spirit. Christ's sanctifying work is known by his immediate presence in the believer's life and the believer's participation in Christ's life. Jesus assumed human nature in order to heal it through this union with God, an idea that is found in Early Church writers as well as in Wesleyan theology. Entire sanctification is the application of Christ's healing presence and power to every part of the personality. It is the reverse of total depravity. To be "entirely sanctified" does not mean that a Christian is as holy as it is possible to be, but that the Holy Spirit is at work in every part of the personality, making that one increasingly like Christ. Without glossing over significant differences on this point, Christians of every tradition support the position that the sanctified life is essentially a life in vital union with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation shows that holiness belongs not to some other plane of existence, but within daily life in a real world. Wesleyans have exhibited a commitment to incarnational ministry and service which seeks to make Christ known through word and deed, such service being seen as the sacramental expression of God's holiness at work in the lives of believers.

A.M. Alchin writes,

> Holiness is about a festival of joy, a dinner party to which all the most unlikely people are invited. For holiness is about God giving his life and love to men, and men giving their life and love to one another in a movement of joy which overflows in thankfulness to God the giver. The Gospels are full of stories about meals taken together, about great ceremonial feasts, about family celebrations with music and dancing, when someone who has been missing turns up, about breakfast by the lakeside in the summer dawn, with fish and bread cooking on the stones.

> The holiness of God is always what we least expected. It works itself out in flesh and blood.[1]

This "outworking in flesh and blood" applied to Jesus Christ during his earthly life and continues so to do as by his Spirit he seeks to express his holiness in our lives. Christianity is founded on Jesus Christ, described by John in the prologue to his Gospel as "the Word who *was* God and who *was* made flesh and dwelt among us." This remarkable statement affirms at one and the same time: "Jesus Christ is God; God was made flesh." Since Bible times, "God" and "flesh" have by many devout souls been seen as mutually exclusive terms. God is holy. Flesh is sinful. Holiness and "the flesh" have nothing in common and indeed can never have any point of contact. But the New Testament writers persisted with this revolutionary (and for many, blasphemous) idea. Faced with the paradox of the Incarnation the author of the Pastoral Epistles exclaimed, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Paul says that God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom.8:3). The writer to the Hebrews says that Christ "partook of the same nature" as those whom he came to save (Heb. 2:14). And prior to his birth it was said to Mary, "the child to be born will be called holy, and the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). He would "be born," i.e. he would be truly human, and he would be truly "holy."

Since Post-Apostolic times Christians have debated the question, "Why did Christ become incarnate?" The Eastern Church tended to hold that Christ would have become incarnate even had there been no need for redemption, because in the Incarnation God accomplished certain things that were needed even had there been no sin for which to atone. By and large the Western Church (both Catholic and Protestant) has argued that Christ entered the stream of human history to accomplish redemption, with the focus being on the Cross.[2] I suggest that both positions are correct, but not in isolation. In addition to providing the means for our redemption on Calvary, the Incarnation has several other important purposes, all of which have a bearing upon our understanding of the sanctification of the believer.

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[1] A.M. Allchin, quoted by Marina Chavchavadze, ed. *Man's Concern with Holiness* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 37.

[2] In recent times scholars such as T. F. Torrance and J. McLeod Campbell have seen the whole of Christ's earthly ministry – life, death, resurrection – as being part of God's saving purpose, with the latter even coining the term "vicarious repentance" to describe Christ's work on earth on our behalf.

The Incarnation Reveals God's Holiness.

Holiness *is* the very character of God. In Old Testament times God employed various means to display his holiness, but "in these last days has spoken in a son" (Heb.1:1). In other words, the clearest depiction of divine holiness is that seen in an earthly life. It was seen not only on the Mount of Transfiguration but at dinner parties, weddings, fishing trips and within the context of friends enjoying each others' company. All these things Jesus did without in any sense ceasing to reveal God's holiness. The Docetist notions of later years which sought to rob Jesus of his authentic humanity opened the door to rejection of holiness (antinomianism) on the one hand and legalistic "holiness" (asceticism) on the other.[3] These notions are still with us and must be seen as quite unbiblical and dishonouring to Christ, the one who is "truly and properly God and truly and properly man." As T. F. Torrance observes,

> It is only by keeping close to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Offspring of the Father's Nature, that we may in some measure know and speak of God in accordance with what he is in his Nature in a way that is both godly and accurate.[4]

In Jesus we encounter God. Jesus is the final Revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-2). Thus we are in error if we seek that revelation outside of Christ. Even God's handiwork in creation cannot provide it to us. Thus we must not look outside of Christ to understand the holiness of God. At times that holiness, as revealed in Jesus, elicited much the same response as when it was encountered in Old Testament times.[5] But as we see from the story of Isaiah's encounter with God and his holiness (Is. 6), the experience was in itself transformative. Holiness is the property of God himself, and truly to encounter him is to be transformed by his holy presence (2 Cor. 3:18). Orthodox scholar Michael Pomazansky says,

> *Holiness* consists not only in the absence of evil or sin; holiness is the presence of higher spiritual values, joined to purity from sin. Holiness is like the light, and the holiness of God is the purest light. God is the

[3] Docetism is a heresy tracing to early Christianity which taught that the body of Christ was not real but only seemed to be (Greek, *dokein*, 'to seem').
[4] T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 134.
[5] Compare Isaiah 6:6 with Luke 5:5

> "one alone holy" by nature. He is the Source of holiness for angels and men. Men can attain to holiness only in God, "not by nature but by participation, by struggle and prayer" (St. Cyril of Jerusalem).[6]

The Incarnation affirms God's positive attitude toward his creation

By entering the course of human history in human form, God gave clear indication that he had not written off his creation. Nor had he rejected those made in his image. In Christ God became a part of that which he had made, and a member of a race which had rebelled against him. By this means he was making it clear that creation in general, and humankind in particular, is capable of redemption and restoration to its former glory.

The salvation which God made possible by entering the human race was to be a full salvation in the sense that it would affect the entirety of the human personality. In particular the Incarnation makes the point that God is concerned not just with "spiritual things"; he seeks to redeem and transform our bodies as well as our spirits. In this regard it is instructive to note that in key verses in which Paul is speaking of the believer's dedication and sanctification he specifically mentions the body (e.g. Rom.12:1; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23). He speaks of Christ being "revealed in our mortal bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10, 11) and of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6:19). And it is noteworthy that each of these verses comes from letters addresses to churches surrounded by the grossest forms of sexual misconduct. Later generations would produce well-intentioned people who saw a morally bankrupt society as the reason for downplaying the significance of the human body or by punishing and abusing it with the view to keeping it under check. These saw God as concerned only with our spiritual nature and either indifferent or hostile to our bodies. Not only medieval monks but many evangelical Christians have held such views. Biblical Christianity stands with the Apostles both in marvelling that "the Word was made flesh" and that it was God's purpose to manifest his holiness in the bodies and souls of frail human beings. The Incarnation says, in effect, God not only calls his people to have clean hearts; he also calls them to have clean bodies (Heb. 10:22).

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[6] Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), 66f.

The Incarnation builds a bridge between God and humankind

Karl Barth says,

> Certainly in *Jesus Christ*, as He is attested in Holy Scripture, we are not dealing with man in the abstract: not with the man who is able with his modicum of religion and religious morality to be sufficient unto himself without God and thus himself to be God. But neither are we dealing with God in the abstract: not with one who in His deity exists only separated from man, distant and strange and thus a non-human if not indeed an inhuman God. In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant *mutually* contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true *God, man's* loyal partner, and as true *man, God's*. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence. He is both, without their being confused but also without their being divided; He is wholly the one and wholly the other. Thus in this oneness Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, between God and man. Thus He comes forward to *man* on behalf of *God* calling and awakening faith, love, and hope, and to *God* on behalf of *man*, representing *man*, making satisfaction and interceding. Thus He attests and guarantees to man God's free *grace* and at the same time attests and guarantees to God man's free *gratitude.*[7]

Christ, as "truly and properly God," comes to us as God to reveal God's holiness to us. And he comes to the Father, as our representative, "truly and properly man," to open up the way for us to enter into the holy place, and to encounter, experience and reflect God's holiness. The Incarnation is the manifestation of "Emmanuel, God with us" (Matt.1:23). What was true during Christ's earthly life is still true. God, in Christ, by his Spirit, is still "with us." And this is the key to living a life in which God's holiness is implanted. It is because God is "with us" that we can experience anything of him and his salvation. It is because of his presence by his Spirit that we experience that which we term "holiness." Wesley, who exclaimed toward the close of his life, "the best of all is - God is with us", shared with his brother Charles the conviction that Christ's sanctifying work

[7] Karl Barth, *The Humanity of* God (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960), 46-47.

was known by his immediate presence in our lives and our participating in his. Charles Wesley wrote:

Come Holy Ghost, all quick'ning fire,
Come, and in me delight to rest;
Drawn by the lure of strong desire,
O come and consecrate my breast;
The temple of my soul prepare,
and *fix they sacred presence there*.

If now thine influence I feel,
If *now in thee begin to live*,
Still to my heart thyself reveal;
Give me thyself, forever give;
A point my good, a drop my store,
Eager I ask, I pant for more.

Eager for thee I ask and pant,
So strong the principle divine
Carries me out with sweet constraint,
Till all my hallow'd soul is thine;
Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,
And lost in thy infinity.[8]

Here Charles Wesley is at one with the Christian mystics and the saints of the Eastern Church. To experience God's holiness is to be "plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea and lost in his infinity." Such sentiments take us far beyond the shallow interpretations often placed upon "deeper life" teaching to a profound vision of a human being sharing in the very life and character of God. Wesley the poet speaks of being "plunged" into God. This is baptismal language – the language so often employed by those who have had a deep, sanctifying experience of God's Spirit. Metaphor it may be, but it aptly describes an experience which is "too deep for words."

The Incarnation makes possible a *full* salvation

God, in Christ, was "made flesh" in order to accomplish his redemptive purposes. The early church Fathers understood this when they affirmed "that which is unassumed is unhealed." This position is reflected in later Wesleyan thought, which saw Christ's saving work as therapeutic. This is noted by Randy Maddox: "Wesley

[8] *Methodist Hymn Book (*New York, 1860), 330, italics added

characterized the very essence of religion as *therapeia psukas* – a therapy by which the Great Physician heals our sin-diseased souls, restoring the vitality of life that God intended for us."[9] Torrance writes

> ...God has joined himself to us in our estranged human life in order to sanctify it, to gather it into union with his own holy life and so lift it up above and beyond the downward drag of sin and decay, and that he allows simply by being one with man in all things. Thus the act of becoming incarnate is itself the *sanctification* of our human life in Jesus Christ, an elevating and fulfilling of it that far surpasses creation; it is a raising up of men and women to stand and have their being in the very life of God...[10]

Jesus assumed our nature in order to heal it. The sanctifying work which today becomes a reality in the life of a committed believer was initiated by the Incarnation. Salvation addresses "the infection" of sin of which the Anglican *Thirty Nine Articles* speak and provides the remedy for this disease. Wesley's belief that God can do more with our sins than simply forgive them applies here. The healing work of salvation in its initial stage is known in justification which deals with our past sins in terms of pardon and forgiveness. But it immediately begins the work of sanctification, which deals with the infection of sin that remains in the life of the believer.[11] What Wesleyans call "entire sanctification" is the application of Christ's healing presence and power to every part of the personality.[12]

The therapeutic understanding of Christ's saving work, which makes possible a "full salvation," was emphasised by the Eastern Church Fathers and within the Wesleyan/Salvationist tradition. This emphasis is seen in the hymnody of that tradition in words such as these:

> Lord, here today my great need I am feeling,
> Wilt thou not visit my soul once again?
> I long to feel thy sweet touch and its healing;
> Wonderful Healer, touch me again.

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[9] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 145.
[10] Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 66.
[11] *Articles of Religion* (Anglican), IX.
[12] This is suggested in 1 Thess. 5:23 by the use of *holokleros*

Often I've pressed through the throng for the blessing
Which, through my doubting, I've failed to obtain;
Here once again to thy feet I am pressing;
Wonderful Healer, touch me again.

Only in thee can I find liberation,
Cleansing and freedom from sin's hidden stain;
Only in thee can I find full salvation,
Wonderful Healer, touch me again.[13]

In similar vein, words by Charles Wesley link the ideas of healing, incarnation and atonement to holiness of life:

Saviour from sin, I wait to prove
That Jesus is thy healing name;
To lose, when perfected in love,
Whate'er I have, or can, or am:
I stay me on thy faithful word, -
The servant shall be as his Lord.

Didst thou not in the flesh appear,
sin to condemn, and man to save?
That perfect love might cast out fear?
That I thy mind in me might have?
In holiness show forth thy praise,
And serve thee all my happy days?

Didst thou not die that I might live
No longer to myself but thee?
Might body, soul and spirit give
To Him who gave himself for me?
Come then, my Master and my God,
Now take the purchase of thy blood.[14]

At this juncture we need to say a word regarding the concept of "Full Salvation." This is another designation for "entire sanctification." The use of the terms "salvation" and "sanctification" in these designations to refer to the same experience reflects the fact that sanctification is not to be divorced from salvation. The other place in which this sort of language is employed in Christian belief is

[13] William Woulds, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London, 1986), no. 610.
[14] Charles Wesley, *Methodist Hymn Book* (New York, 1849), no. 488.

in the doctrine of total depravity.[15] Some interpret this concept intensively, seeing human beings as corrupted in an absolute sense. This does not, however, seem to square with the facts. All people continue to bear the image of God, even though that image is defaced. God's common grace[16] is at work in all the world, restraining evil and making possible all those qualities which make for a just society. Thus many of us would understand total depravity to be extensive, rather than intensive in human lives. That is, although a person is not as evil as it is possible to be, sin infects every part of the personality. This means that a person may be a reasonable, kind and honest person but if left unchecked by God's grace has the proclivity to become increasingly sinful. Thus we could say that a person outside of Christ is infected by sin in every part of the personality, and has the capacity to move toward the point where they could be described as intensively depraved. Entire sanctification, or full salvation, is the reverse of total depravity. To be "entirely sanctified" does not mean that a Christian is intensively holy, i.e. as holy as it is possible to be, but that the Holy Spirit is at work in every part of the personality, making that one increasingly like Christ.

The Incarnation demonstrates that holiness continues to be expressed in the context of humanness

"*God was manifest* in the flesh" (1 Tim.3:16). It was *God himself* who appeared "in the flesh." This is the God of absolute holiness (Is. 6). Jesus Christ did not just display God's holiness. God himself "was in Christ" revealing his holiness in and through the humanity of Christ.

Such holiness is not merely an attribute of God; God's very nature is holiness. God does not just "possess" holiness; He *is* holy - without qualification. Thus there was a time when true, perfect, ultimate holiness, was seen here on earth. And it was not seen by the repudiation of the "flesh" but in and through human flesh. This is the starting point for our understanding of the life of holiness. In

[15] See The Doctrines of The Salvation Army, no. 5; the Articles of Religion of the United Methodist Church (USA), VII; the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene, V.

[16] This term, which comes from Reformed theology, speaks of the grace of God at work in all of God's creation, and in particular in the lives of people. It is not saving grace, but it is nevertheless God's way of accomplishing his purposes on earth. The concept of common grace bears similarities to Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace.

the context of an authentic human life, one which was "at all points tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15), perfect holiness was "fleshed out." The great paradox of the Incarnation is that Jesus Christ was and is truly God and truly man.

As a man he experienced suffering, sorrow, joy, disappointment, temptations, peace, anger, joy, loneliness pain, and all the other emotions that are known to us. At the same time he lived a consistently holy life so that those who looked at the one who was "made flesh" and who "dwelt among" them could say that as they observed his life they "beheld his glory, the glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-14).

The event of the Incarnation says that holiness and "the flesh" are compatible. It says that a human being can be holy. It says that holy living is for this life as well as the next. As the fifth-century monk, Hesychios of Jerusalem, once said, "Through his incarnation God gave us the model for a holy life."[17] Thus Jesus is seen as our example for living rightly (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). But the holiness set forth in scripture is more than the following of an example. The seventeenth-century Puritan and Calvinist Henry Scougal called it "the life of God in the soul of man," and the twentieth-century "high" Anglican A. M. Allchin says "Man was made by God to find this unbelievable fulfilment in union with him. He was made in God's image and likeness, in order that he might share in the divine nature and be partaker of God's holiness."[18] These quotations serve to remind us that the teaching of holy living is not the private domain of any one Christian tradition. It certainly occupies a place of significance within Wesleyan thought, but others not within the Wesleyan community have had much to say on the subject, including, for example, John Calvin:

> Holiness is not a merit by which we can attain communion with God, but a gift of Christ, which enables us to cling to him, and follow him.
>
> Scripture not only shows the principle of holiness, but also that Christ is the way to it.
>
> The Lord has adopted us to be his children, on the condition that we reveal an imitation of Christ who is the mediator of our adoption.

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[17] *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1. (London: Fisher and Faber, 1979), 164.
[18] *Philokalia*, 41.

> Since the Holy Spirit has dedicated us as temples of God, we should exert ourselves not to profane his sanctuary but to display his glory.
>
> Perfection must be the final mark at which we aim, and the goal for which we strive.
>
> Let us steadily exert ourselves to reach a higher degree of holiness till we finally arrive at a perfection of holiness which we seek and pursue as long as we live, but which we shall attain then only, when, freed from all earthly infirmity, we shall be admitted into his full communion.[19]
>
> Where zeal for integrity and holiness is not in force, there neither the Spirit of Christ nor Christ himself are present.[20]

Calvin's theology is solidly Christocentric. He and his sixteenth-century co-workers saw all of Christian life and experience – including election – as being "in Christ". He told his followers: "there is no sanctification apart from communion with Christ."[21] At this point those in the Wesleyan/Salvationist tradition are in accord with Calvin when they affirm:

> Holiness in men is possible only when Jesus, who once lived among men, lives in them in the transforming power of His Spirit.
>
> This transformation is concerned with the sanctifying work God does *in* and *through* men by:
>
> (i) *delivering* from self and sin;
> (ii) *purifying* from defilement
> (iii) *transforming* their lives in holy love so that devotion to God takes the place of devotion to self, and wrongdoing is replaced by holy conduct.

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[19] John Calvin, *Golden Book of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker. 1952), 11 – 19. These fine words do not suggest that there is no difference between Wesleyans and the Calvinists regarding holiness of life. But they do indicate that the two theologies converge at a number of points (even Wesley affirmed that he was but "a hair's breadth removed from Calvinism"!). They also remind each of the communities represented by these theological traditions that it is quite wrong to create a man of straw in order to denigrate the other's position. To do so in the name of holiness is to deny the very holiness we seek to uphold.

[20] Quoted by Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit, Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 318.

[21] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John McNeil (Louisville: Westminster, 1960), Bk. III:14:3.

> ...holiness in man is the moral quality of character and conduct shown by those who, through the indwelling Spirit, share Christ's conduct and consent to be ruled by Him.[22]

It would be possible to provide quotations from Christians of every tradition to support the position that the sanctified life is essentially a life in vital union with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification, seen as "a work of grace," is thus the expression and outworking of a relationship with Christ made possible by the presence of his Spirit. Nothing in the Christian life is somehow "external" to Christ. All of Christian life and experience is "in his Son" (1 John 5:10). Even grace itself is not to be seen as a sort of fluid or essence, as is sometimes the case when some traditions speak of ordination and sacraments.[23]

Wesley understood this. For him grace was not an essence external to Christ. Rather, grace was none other than the presence of The Holy Spirit. For him grace was "the power of his Holy Spirit, which alone worketh in us all that is acceptable in his sight."[24] In passing it is worth noting that Karl Barth, who asserted that Christ is the one true sacrament, developed what has been described (particularly by Roman Catholic scholars) as a non-sacramental theology in which he denied that baptism was capable of conveying grace. Barth says that the humanity of Jesus Christ "is the one true *mysterium*, the one sacrament, and the one existential fact before and beside and after which there is no room for any other of the same rank."[25]

Commenting on Barth's sacramental position, William Stacy Johnson says that Barth holds "that there is only one true sacrament, Jesus Christ, and one true sacramental sign, the baptism in the Holy Spirit." This, of course, echoes Salvationist theology, which avers that Christ does not require sacramental "means of grace" to work in our lives; he works directly, in grace, through his Spirit.[26]

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[22] *Handbook of Doctrine* (London: The Salvation Army, 1969), 151.
[23] William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 167.
[24] Quoted by Maddox, 120.
[25] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 286.
[26] There are those who argue that Salvationism is incompatible with Wesleyanism because of Wesley's sacramental views. However Wesley's view of the immediacy of grace lends support to the former's position which sees baptism and communion not as rites but as experiences of God the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4 – *humeis de*

God's holiness was demonstrated for all to see in the person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation shows that holiness belongs not to some other plane of existence, but within daily life in a real world. Donald G. Bloesch says,

> Biblical faith upholds a this-worldly holiness that is lived out in the midst of the pain and conflict of the world. Among mystics the aim is frequently to rise above the afflictions of life into an eternal repose that makes life bearable...We do not simply endure but we overcome through the anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Oppression, pain, sickness and destitution are not to be sublimely accepted in the hope that they will be made to serve vicarious redemption. Instead they belong inescapably to the old order of existence that serves sin and death. The forces that maim and enslave are to be counteracted and dispelled through the redeeming power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ manifested in his cross and resurrection and poured out on his followers at Pentecost.[27]

This article began with a quotation by Anglican Scholar A. M. Allchin which described holiness as a "festival of joy, a dinner party to which the most unlikely people are invited." The words just quoted by Reformed scholar Donald Bloesch speak of a "this-worldly holiness that is lived out in the midst of the pain and conflict of the world." Both are correct. The joy of the Lord is not diminished by the burdens of life. The holiness of Jesus was expressed in his joy and his sorrow. Holy living has to do with the whole of life. It is full salvation both in terms of affecting the whole of our personalities and the whole of our existence. And from that point it reaches out in holy love to the whole of society and this is the reason why some of the keenest advocates of holy living have been the most committed Christian social reformers and why most movements which give a significant place to this doctrine are also at the forefront of social ministries. At the same time these movements have not, in the main, been much concerned with the finer points of eschatology. Whereas some conservative and evangelical groups give a large place to "end times" teaching, Wesleyans have usually been more concerned with the challenge of serving "the present age." This also means that instead of seeing the present life as a vale of tears which must be endured in preparation for the life to come, they, like

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baptisthesesthe en Pneumati Hagio; 1 Cor. 12:13 – *en eni Pneumati hemeis pantes eis en soma ebaptisthemen;* 2 Cor. 13:14 – *he koinonia Hagiou Pneumatos*), etc.

[27]Bloesch, 320.

Wesley, have adhered to a form of realised eschatology which is this-world-affirming and which rejoices now in the blessings of heaven, at least as a significant foretaste. This in turn has proven to be effective in giving such Christians a commitment to incarnational ministry and service which seeks to make Christ known through word and deed. And such service is seen as the sacramental expression of God's holiness at work in the lives of believers. Russian Archbishop Anthony says

> ...just as God became man, just as his holiness was present in the flesh in our midst, living, acting and saving, so now, through the mystery of the Incarnation, the Church participates in the eternity, the holiness of God, and at the same time in the salvation of the world. The holiness of the Church must find its place in the world of crucified love, and in an active and living presence. But essentially, it is the holiness, the presence of God, that we should manifest to the world. This is what we are for.[28]

The Incarnation was not God in disguise. It *really* was God – in the flesh. Nor is Christian holiness a disguise. It is the outward and visible sign – in human flesh - of an inner, a spiritual, grace which cleanses from sin and imparts God's holy love.

[28] Metropolitan Anthony, *God and Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 85f.

ALWAYS CHANGING, ALWAYS THE SAME: HOLINESS IN GREGORY OF NYSSA

Adam Couchman

This paper begins with a brief outline of the Neoplatonist philosophical milieu of Gregory's time and how this influenced his theology. The place of "allegory" as a hermeneutical tool is also discussed. Both of these important introductory analyses are foundational to the primary purpose of this investigation; namely, how holiness is enunciated by Gregory. The investigation of holiness is then be divided into three components, with individual focus on the topics of participation in the divine nature, progress in perfection, and the proper use of the passions.

Introduction

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395 C.E.) was an extremely important fourth century theologian.[1] One of the three "Cappadocian Fathers", alongside his brother Basil the Great and good friend Gregory Nazianzen, his influence has continued to have an impact on the church, particularly in regard to Trinitarian theology. The purpose of this essay is to investigate the way Gregory understood Christian holiness. Throughout his writings Gregory uses paradox as a rhetorical device to contrast and hold in tension two seeming opposites. For example, he contrasts the immutability of God with the changing nature of humanity, and the continuing progress of the Christian walk with the stability of standing on the rock which is Christ. The use of paradox will be highlighted throughout this essay within the three categories of participation in the divine nature, progress in perfection, and the proper use of the passions. The title for this essay, "Always changing, always the same" is an attempt to capture both the use of paradox in Gregory's writings as well as the idea that holiness is both a gift of grace, and a continuing progression requiring the effort of the believer throughout all of life and beyond.

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[1] For the purpose of simplicity "Gregory of Nyssa" will be referred to simply as "Gregory" for the remainder of this essay, except in the circumstance where it is necessary to distinguish from Gregory Nazianzen.

Gregory and Neoplatonism

Neoplatonism is a term used to describe the adapted form of Platonic philosophy that was commenced by Plotinus (204-70 C.E.), lasting in its pagan form down to the sixth century.[2] Richard Tarnas suggests that Neoplatonism sought to bridge the "schism" that existed between the "rational philosophies" and the "mystery religions." In the work of Plotinus, "Greek rational philosophy reached its end point and passed over into another, more thoroughly religious spirit, a suprarational mysticism."[3]

In Neoplatonic thought the cosmos emanates from the Divine being, known as the One. The One is infinite and beyond all categories and descriptions, beyond all thought and all being, ineffable and incomprehensible. The One is the creator of the cosmos by a series of emanations; divine Intellect (*Nous*) comes from the One, and the Soul (*psyché*) comes from *Nous*. These three gradations within the "great chain of being,"[4] known as *hypostases*, are not separate entities, but rather are timelessly present in all things.[5]

Tarnas indicates how Plotinus described in his writings the complex nature of the universe and its "participation in the divine". This terminology is common in Gregory's writings. In particular Gregory uses this in relation to his interpretation of *imago Dei*. Further, within Neoplatonic thought;

> The entire universe exists in a continual outflow from the One into created multiplicity, which is then drawn back into the One—a process of emanation and return always moved by the One's superfluity of perfection. The philosopher's task is to overcome the human bondage to the physical realm by moral and intellectual self-discipline and purification, and to turn inward to a gradual ascent back to the Absolute.[6] Similarly, this relates to Gregory's doctrine of *epektasis*, the continual progress in perfection, which will be outlined in more detail later.

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[2] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 1.
[3] Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 84.
[4] Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 13.
[5] Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 85. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 2. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (New York: Image Books, 2003), 464.
[6] Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 86.

These small examples show that Neoplatonic thought did have a profound impact on Gregory, however it should not be assumed that the use of common language and concepts equates with Gregory's theology being birthed out of this school of philosophy. Caution needs to be displayed before referring to Gregory as a "Christian Platonist" or "Christian Neoplatonist." It should be noted that the distinction that exists between "philosophy" and "theology" in the present post-Enlightenment period was not evident in Gregory's day. The Greek Fathers would not have objected to being called "philosophers", for they referred to Christianity as "the divine philosophy."[7] Given the intertwining of philosophy and theology in Gregory's day it is therefore not unusual for him to adopt certain notions and terms from Plato, Plotinus or Aristotle. "That Gregory was a man of erudition, that his true intellectual interests had been with Greek philosophy and poetry, that he uses Platonic terminology in expounding his theological thought—all these are facts which no serious student of Gregory can dispute..."[8] However this does not make him a Christian Platonist, Neoplatonist or Aristotelian. Such terms would be anachronistic to Gregory and his contemporaries. Rather, as Constantine Cavarnos asserts, the "*foundation* of [his] thought is neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism, nor some other secular system of thought, but is Christian revelation."[9] Cavarnos continues with regard to the Church Fathers in general;

> Although they did use many elements from Plato and Aristotle, they chose those elements that did not contradict revealed teaching, but were in harmony with it and helped express or illustrate its content. In other words, their use of pagan philosophy was not a wholesale, slavish one. It was a very selective or "eclectic" use, which left them quite free to criticise the errors of secular philosophy.[10]

George Bebis agrees when he suggests that:

> Philosophical conceptions and philosophical categories have become a common property in the age of the great Fathers of the Church and were used extensively by Christian and non-Christian thinkers alike. The most

[7] Constantine Cavarnos, *The Hellenic-Christian Philosophical Tradition* (Belmont: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989), 19.
[8] George Bebis, *The Mind of the Fathers* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 68.
[9] Cavarnos, 18.
[10] Cavarnos, 19.

> important point, however, which should be made here is that the use of philosophical language by Gregory of Nyssa (and the rest of the Fathers) is not a sign of spiritual indigence or improvisation, but on the contrary, it proves a deep sense of "historicity," a profound respect for history in which the *magnalis Dei* (the mighty deeds of God) are intrinsically linked and united in the great design for the salvation of mankind.[11]

Thus Gregory, in his *Life of Moses* (in which he puts forth Moses as the "example for life")[12] suggests that one philosophical notion (the immortality of the soul) is a "pious offspring", whilst another (the transference of the soul) is "a fleshy and alien foreskin."[13] This indicates his willingness to be critically selective with contemporary philosophy; willing to reject that which contradicts his understanding of Christian revelation, whilst at the same time adopting that which suited his purposes. Within his treatise on Moses, Gregory allegorises and thus subordinates philosophy to the higher pursuit of the Christian life, making philosophy the "handmaiden of faith."[14] He likens it to the treasures of Egypt that the Israelites took with them when they left captivity.

> Our guide in virtue commands someone who "borrows" from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.[15]

Johannes Quasten suggests that Gregory has "thoroughly Christianized his Neo-Plantonist borrowings"[16] and even given them a "complete Christian metamorphosis."[17] Similarly, Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson recognise that Gregory's "greatest debt is clearly to Plato," however, "all has undergone a profound transformation into a Christian synthesis."[18] As a result, whilst

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[11] Bebis, *The Mind of the Fathers*, 70. See also Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3 (Allen: Christian Classics, n.d.), 285.
[12] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe, and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 33.
[13] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 63.
[14] Edward Rochie Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 236.
[15] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 81.
[16] Quasten, *Patrology*, 268.
[17] Quasten, *Patrology*, 285.
[18] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 5.

contemporary Neoplatonic philosophical terminology and ideas are prevalent within Gregory's writings they are neither the guiding principal nor the undergirding purpose. "Although it was Plato who exercised the profoundest influence upon Gregory, upon his training, his outlook, his terminology and his approach to a problem, he by no means constitutes the sole basis for Gregory's system."[19] Similarly, Martin Laird shows that "Gregory's concern for development and transformation as a result of union, in which the soul could never become identical with the One, distinguish him definitively from the...Neoplatonist."[20]

Therefore it seems anachronistic to refer to Gregory as a "Christian Neoplatonist" (or similar). Instead, Gregory's use of the philosophical language of Neoplatonism suggests that he was an astute man of his times; educated in the philosophy of his day, willing to critique or adopt concepts as he saw appropriate, but primarily a minister of the Christian gospel. Gregory's ability to communicate the truths of his faith with the philosophical language of his day enabled him to engage with those educated and adept in Platonic thought as well as less educated Christians within his diaconate, and beyond. As a result his theology became both an apology and a pastoral tool.

Gregory's Use of Allegory

As a method of Scriptural interpretation allegory is one of the most controversial. Certainly in the modern era the preference to rely more on scientifically sustainable methodologies, such as the historical-critical method, has seen most scholars become sceptical of the place of allegory in biblical interpretation.

> Many contemporary readers think patristic allegorical interpretations are little more than the pious fantasies of the precritical mind. For them, textual obscurity or discomfort ought to be illuminated by history, not schemes of spiritual discipline or anthropologies of spirit and body. A wayward text should challenge our assumptions rather than prompt a counterintuitive rereading, and a text should be allowed to say what it means and no more. For these critics, allegorical reading tends to spin out of control. In their view, attempts to discern the "other speak" of

[19] Quasten, *Patrology*, 284.
[20] Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128-29.

> scripture must be resisted and, ultimately, rejected because they are dangerous and wrong.[21]

Allegorical interpretation of scripture is a method whereby the literal sense of the text becomes a kind of "map" for a deeper, more "spiritual" understanding. It focuses upon codes and figures that are used to find that deeper meaning and it seeks to interpret the scriptures "in terms of the divine economy."[22] It is a method that "transforms the historical essence of the Bible and its pedagogic message into a flowing stream of true and spiritual experience."[23] So it could be said that the purpose of this method of interpretation is not so much the literal meaning of the specific text in hand, but rather how that text relates to the larger story of the economy of salvation. Therefore it tends to be a broad and canonical approach to scriptural interpretation.

Gregory was certainly well acquainted with this method and employed it in *The Life of Moses* a work that applies to this investigation of his understanding of holiness. In this work the literal meaning of the biblical text is the *historia*. For Gregory, the biblical account of Moses' life is assumed to be historically accurate and reliable. "Moses was born a slave in Egypt, he was raised in Pharaoh's house, he fled Egypt, married, saw the burning bush, returned to Egypt as God's instrument of liberation, and died within sight of the promised land."[24] This first level is the "surface of a mystery." It supports a second, spiritual level called *theoria* that uses the *historia* as a "map for the journey of the soul to God."[25] Anthony Meredith notes that Gregory defends the use of allegory in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, even though his brother, Basil, writes against it.[26] In that work Gregory states; "I hope that my commentary will be a guide for the more fleshly-minded, since the wisdom hidden [in the Song of Songs] leads to a spiritual state of the soul."[27]

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[21] John J. O'Keefe, and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 107.
[22] O'Keefe, *Sanctified Vision*, 90.
[23] Bebis, *The Mind of the Fathers*, 76.
[24] O'Keefe, *Sanctified Vision*, 100.
[25] O'Keefe, *Sanctified Vision*, 100.
[26] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 54.

[27] Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, tr. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, Mass: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 35 cited in Morwenna Ludlow,

Gregory's use of allegory, like his reinterpretation of Neoplatonic ideas and concepts, is evidence also of him being a man of his times. Malherbe and Ferguson show how Gregory uses an exegetical methodology that is comparable with Philo, Origen and Clement of Alexandria. "Gregory takes the 'moral' allegories of Philo and extends them in the direction of 'mysticism' by his application of them to the spiritual life. He goes beyond Origen, for whom the 'spiritual' interpretation is an interiorization of the sacraments."[28]

It is also significant to consider *how* Gregory uses metaphor and allegory as "means of expression."

> They enable him to speak of God as present, revealed and united with his creatures but at the same time incomprehensible and surpassing what words can express or define. In this open-ended poetic language, each image points beyond itself and evokes multiple levels of meaning. Thus, metaphor and allegory are excellent vehicles for conveying the theology and spirituality of eternal growth.[29]

Gregory's understanding of "perfection as progress" will be discussed in more detail later in this essay. For now it is sufficient to say that allegorical interpretation is used by Gregory as a means of communicating this theological perspective on holiness, which Verna Harrison has referred to above as "eternal growth." As a result, both the language of Neoplatonism that he adopts and adapts, along with his use of allegory as a means of interpretation, aid Gregory in communicating his understanding of holiness in the Christian life. This is also done in such a way that speaks alike to both the philosophically educated elite and Christians within his pastoral concern.

Participation in the Divine Nature

Holiness as it relates to the Divine Nature in the human person is a key concept for Gregory.[30] It is a constant theme in his writings,

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Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)Modern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 129.

[28] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 6-7.

[29] Verna E.F. Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom According to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, vol. 30, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 97.

[30] Lewis Ayres notes that Gregory avoids the basic terminology of deification. For example, while Gregory Nazianzen uses the term *theosis* a number of times, Gregory

and it can be seen that his understanding of holiness involves reclaiming, cleansing and improving the image of God that is in all persons through creation. Gregory's understanding of the image of God in the human person commences with expressing what the Divine Nature is like within God's self. A summary of his understanding of this is firstly expressed in *The Life of Moses*.

> The Divine One is himself the Good...whose very nature is goodness. This he is and he is so named, and is known by this nature. Since, then, it has not been demonstrated that there is any limit to virtue except evil, and since the Divine does not admit of an opposite, we hold the divine nature to be unlimited and infinite.[31]

Secondly, in his *Homily on the Sixth Beatitude*, Gregory states;

> [The] Divine Nature...surpasses every mental concept. For It is altogether inaccessible to reasoning and conjecture, nor has there been found any human faculty capable of perceiving the incomprehensible; for we cannot devise a means of understanding inconceivable things. [32]

Likewise, in *On the Making of Man* he writes that "God is in His own nature all that which our mind can conceive of good; - rather, transcending all good that we can conceive or comprehend."[33] Thus Gregory's understanding of the Divine Nature could be summarised as *limitless good*; the only limit of this Divine Nature is that it has no limits.[34] As God is also "inconceivable" it would seem that humanity is completely incapable of knowing God. However, as people are created in the image of God, this privilege is made available to them; the *participation* in the Divine Nature.

In seeking to understand what Gregory means by participation in the Divine Nature it is necessary to start with how the image of God is present in human nature. For Gregory, humanity was created with the capacity to share in the goodness of God. The likeness of God

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of Nyssa uses it sparingly. The same is true for the word *theopoiesis*. So I have chosen to use the more common term *participation* in this essay. See Lewis Ayres, "Deification and the Dynamics of Nicene Theology: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:4 (2005): 377.

[31] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 31.

[32] Gregory of Nyssa, "Sermon Six on the Beatitudes " in *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Johannes Quasten, and Joseph Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 146.

[33] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1892), 64.

[34] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 31.

that is present in humanity is seen in the good virtues of human nature, and the freedom that exists within those virtues.

> Thus there is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing that we conceive: but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but have decision in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue.[35]

The image of God in Christians is not their possession, but rather it is present as a result of "participation in all good;"[36] that is, participation in God. This is a "permanent condition that defines the human, yet also exists in a continuous process of eternal growth, by which the human becomes more and more like God."[37] Harrison summarises this in the following way;

> God's purpose in creating us was to enable us to participate in his own goodness. The divine image is given to us as the foundation within our nature which makes this possible, the kinship between the divine and human natures through which they can come together by way of participation. The image is actually the participation itself as well as the capacity to participate. This is because it is not so much a static condition as a dynamic process of becoming more and more like God through ever increasing participation in him. Our present level of participation is the grace which enables us to move to a higher level.[38]

The consequences of sin for Gregory are that the image of God in humanity is stained; hidden under "vile coverings". In his *Homily on the Sixth Beatitude* he encourages his congregation not to despair at the seemingly impossible task set forth in the verse at hand (Matthew 5:8). Gregory sees the promise that the pure of heart will "see God", but also takes into consideration other verses which state that no one has seen God (John 1:18, 6:46; 1 John 4:12) and attempts to resolve this paradox. The image of God, even though stained by sin, is still present in humanity and in this Gregory sees the "standard by which to apprehend the Divine;" since God "imprinted" on human nature "the likeness of the glories of His own Nature." It is in their virtues that people see God and so in order to

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[35] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 64.
[36] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 64.
[37] Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 90.
[38] Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 89.

once again see the image of God they must "wash off by a good life" those vile coverings that have been stuck on their hearts, and then "the Divine Beauty will again shine forth" in them.[39] Similarly, in *The Life of Moses*, Gregory exhorts his readers to "turn to the better, putting evil behind" them. As they do so, "the images and impressions of virtue... are imprinted on the purity of [their] soul."[40]

Harrison highlights that Gregory intrinsically links the image of God in humanity in terms of "participation."

> In this he is utilising an ontological concept that is derived from Plato and occurs in all forms of Platonism. The concept is that originals or archetypes on a higher level of reality have copies or images on a lower level of reality. This relationship between an archetype and its image is established through participation...Participation is what produces the copy's likeness to its original...This derived sharing in the being of another, higher reality is what Gregory sees as happening when the human image participates in the divine attributes. [41]

This concept of "participation" is at the very heart of Christianity for Gregory and influences his understanding of what a Christian in fact is; "by participating in Christ we are given the title 'Christian,' so also are we drawn into a share in the lofty ideas which it implies." Further, Gregory argues that it is not possible to be a Christian without displaying the virtues of Christ. Christianity, for Gregory, is an "imitation of the divine nature," and "brings man back to his original good fortune." In a sense, then, the rebirth of Christianity for Gregory is being re-created in the image of God, through participation in the Divine Nature.[42]

Holiness in Gregory's writings is expressed in similar terms; "This, therefore, is perfection in the Christian life...the participation of one's soul and speech and activities in all of the names by which Christ is signified so that the perfect holiness...is taken upon oneself in 'the whole body and soul and spirit.'"[43] By the "Mediator", that is Christ, the Christian is "given a share in the Godhead...having

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[39] Gregory of Nyssa, "Sermon Six on the Beatitudes, " 149.
[40] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 65.
[41] Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 90.
[42] Gregory of Nyssa, "On What It Means to Call Oneself a Christian," in *Saint Gregory of Nyssa - Ascetical Works* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 85.
[43] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," in *Saint Gregory of Nyssa - Ascetical Works* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 121.

become pure through the reception of His purity."[44] Here is an example of Gregory's use of paradox. In one sense perfection involves the constant effort of the Christian in the imitation of Christ's virtues, by participating in his Divine nature. However at the same time the Christian has already become pure through receiving Christ's purity. This paradox is held together by Gregory's definition of perfection, which is not a bounded, ideological and static condition made available at glorification but rather the continuous progress of a Christian's participation within a limitless God. As a result, Gregory encourages his readers to continue to "exchange 'glory for glory,' becoming greater through daily increase, ever perfecting himself, and never arriving too quickly at the limit of perfection. For this is truly perfection: never to stop growing towards what is better and never placing any limit on perfection."[45]

Progress in Perfection

Gregory uses the word *epektasis* to describe constant progress in perfection within the Christian life. The key verse that leads Gregory to this doctrine is Philippians 3:13 in which Paul speaks of forgetting what is behind and "straining toward" (*ἐπεκτεινόμενος*) what is ahead. This continuous movement forward in the faith depicts, for Gregory, the progression that takes place in the life of the Christian.

> Even after listening in secret to the mysteries of heaven, Paul does not let the graces he has obtained become the limit of his desire but he continues to go on and on, never ceasing his ascent. Thus he teaches us... that in our constant participation in the blessed nature of the Good, the graces that we receive at every point are indeed great, but the path that lies beyond our immediate grasp is infinite. This will constantly happen to those who thus share in the divine Goodness, and they will always enjoy a greater and greater participation in grace throughout all eternity.[46]

Jean Danielou further summarises Gregory's doctrine of *epektasis*;

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[44] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," 116.
[45] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," 122.
[46] *Commentary on Canticle of Canticles*, J.P. Migne, *Patrologia graeca* vol. 44.940D-941.A, cited in Jean Danielou, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, ed. Herbert Musurillo, trans. Herbert Musurillo (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 58-59.

> Perfection consists in this perpetual penetration into the interior, a perpetual discovery of God. This is essentially what Gregory is describing. Men always have the tendency to stabilize, to fix, the various stages of perfection which they have attained...For Gregory...the future is always better than the past. But to overcome this natural tendency of the soul, Gregory offers the support of faith.[47]

One of Gregory's most unique metaphors for describing this progress in perfection is the paradox of "luminous darkness."[48] Using Moses as a guide for the spiritual life, Gregory states that "Moses' vision of God began with light; afterwards God spoke to him in the cloud. But when Moses rose higher and became more perfect, he saw God in the darkness."[49] So for Gregory, progress in perfection is, metaphorically, moving from light towards darkness. That is, in the early stages of the Christian life the light fills the life of the new believer and contrasts the darkness experienced in the life of sin. Gregory allegorises three theophanies in Moses' life commencing at the burning bush (Exodus 3) to illustrate this.

> In the same way that Moses on that occasion attained to this knowledge, so now does everyone who, like him, divests himself of the earthly covering and looks to light shining from the bramble bush, that is, to the Radiance which shines upon us through this thorny flesh and which is... the true light and the truth itself.[50]

The second metaphor of the Christian life is taken from Moses' theophany in the cloud on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24). This is the next stage of the progression into *luminous darkness* whereby the Christian begins to recognise the incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature. The final theophany in this progression is Moses' being shown the back of God as he passes by (Exodus 33). In this final theophany Moses is "covered" by God in the cleft of the rock, and is thus in darkness for that time. Gregory allegorises this in order to show that as Christians progress in perfection they become more and more aware of the impossibility of knowing in full the Divine Nature.

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[47] Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 61.
[48] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 95.
[49] *Commentary on Canticle of Canticles,* J.P. Migne, *Patrologia graeca* vol. 44.1000C, cited in Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 23.
[50] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 60.

> This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, *No one has ever seen God*, thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature.[51]

The continuous progress in perfection that Gregory refers to "translates into action the ideal of 'likeness to the infinite God.'"[52] Morwenna Ludlow highlights that it is the "*eschatological* nature of *epektasis* which gives it its value," since "it is not the case that human nature will go through a period of dynamic change (either in this life or the next) only to eventually reach a final state of atemporal, unchanging perfection."[53]

> For Gregory, the soul reaches out into the divine darkness, losing its own power of vision only to enjoy a greater mode of sensing the presence of God. So on the one hand, God is satisfying to the soul. But Gregory's eschatology is summed up in a paradox, that our satisfaction is never to be satisfied.[54]

Further, Harrison states that "grace enlarges the soul's capacity to receive grace and then fills it again and again in a process of eternal growth."[55] Thus this progress in perfection is the Christian's never ceasing growth, by grace, through participation in the Divine Nature; the depths of which can never be plumbed, its heights can never be scaled, and its width never spanned.

The Proper use of Passions

Gregory is again a man of his times in his employment of *apatheia* in his theology. This is a difficult term to translate, and indeed Gregory has a somewhat unique application of this term. It does, however, importantly relate to this discussion of holiness, as well as the two previous phrases - participation in the Divine Nature, and progress in perfection.

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[51] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 95.
[52] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 77.
[53] Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)Modern*, 132.
[54] Kathryn Rombs, "Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Epektasis: Some Logical Implications," *Studia Patristica* XXXVII (2001): 292.
[55] Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 130.

It has been suggested that this term refers to the continuous "fight against the passions and entanglements of this world."[56] In employing this definition Quasten suggests that *apatheia* is a state that can be reached. Some of Gregory's writings seem to indicate that this is an adequate definition. For example, in discussing prayer Gregory suggests the following: "Whatever anyone may set out to do, if it is done with prayer the undertaking will prosper and he will be kept from sin, because there is nothing to oppose him and *drag the soul into passion*."[57] Further, "Now the human soul cannot be alienated from God except through a mind enslaved by passions. For as the Divine Nature is altogether impassible, a man who is always entangled in passion is debarred from union with God."[58]

Similarly, in Gregory's hagiography of his sister, *The Life of St Macrina*, he recounts sitting with his older sister sharing in grief following their brother Basil's death. "As we spoke, we recalled the memory of the great Basil and my soul was afflicted and my face fell and tears poured from my eyes." In contrast, Macrina's reasoned discussion of "the divine plan hidden in misfortune" seems to lift Gregory's soul "out of its human sphere."[59] This could be interpreted as an example of *apatheia*; "fighting against the passions and entanglements of this world", as previously defined by Quasten.

However, Quasten's suggestion that *apatheia* is a state that can be reached seems to contradict Gregory's understanding of progress in perfection as a continuous movement. As a result I suggest that the definition given above is inadequate. This can be seen in other selections of Gregory's writings. For example, in *On Perfection*, Gregory states that the "marks of the true Christian are all those we know in connection with Christ." So, the Christian is to "imitate" that in Christ which "we have room for" (for example in forgiving one another), and "reverence and worship" that which our nature does not approximate" (for example, his divinity). Later, he states that;

> Whatever is done or thought or said through passion has no agreement with Christ, but bears the character of the adversary, who smears the

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[56] Quasten, *Patrology*, 295.
[57] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer*, ed. Johannes Quasten, and Joseph Plumpe, trans. Hilda C. Graef, vol. 18, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 23. Emphasis added.
[58] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer*, 31.
[59] Gregory of Nyssa, "The Life of St Macrina," in *Saint Gregory of Nyssa - Ascetical Works* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 175.

> pearl of the soul with the mud of the passions and dims the lustre of the precious stone. What is free from every passionate inclination looks to the source of passionlessness, who is Christ...For the purity in Christ and the purity seen in the person who has a share in Him are the same.[60]

Therefore, for Gregory, *apatheia* is exampled by Christ as "passionlessness." However, he does recognise in other writings that passions such as "anger," "fear," and "desire for pleasure," are in fact present in the Christian life. As a result "virtue consists in the good employment of these movements, and vice in their bad employment, and in addition...through desire...we are brought nearer God, drawn up, by its chain as it were, from earth towards Him."[61] So Gregory encourages the reader to "struggle...against this very unstable element of our nature, engaging in a close contest with our opponent...not becoming victors by destroying our nature, but by not allowing it to fall."[62]

As a result, whilst Gregory does speak of *apatheia* as passionlessness, in the light of his preference for continuous progress in perfection, it seems appropriate, therefore, to define *apatheia* as the "proper use of passions." This comes about as the Christian progresses in perfection through participation in the Divine Nature.

Conclusion

Gregory of Nyssa has had a definitive and unique contribution to make to Christian theology. Having adopted and adapted terminology and concepts from his contemporary philosophy, Neoplatonism, and Christianising them he was able to communicate both to the educated elite and the Christians within his diaconate. His use of allegory saw him interpret the life of Moses in terms of the divine economy of salvation. As a result, Moses' life became the example of the Christian life of perfection. The Christian life in Gregory's writings have been shown to involve participation in the Divine Nature, continuous progress in perfection and the proper use of the passions. Christian holiness in Gregory of Nyssa is derivative of the holiness of God. God is limitless good and therefore there are no limits to his perfection. As a result, the Christian never ceases to

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[60] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," 121.
[61] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1892), 108.
[62] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," 121-22.

progress in his or her participation in the Divine Nature, becoming more and more like Christ; always changing, always the same. This final exhortation for the Christian from Gregory himself summarises his doctrine of holiness well;

> Let him exchange 'glory for glory', becoming greater through daily increase, ever perfecting himself, and never arriving too quickly at the limit of perfection. For this is truly perfection: never to stop growing towards what is better and never placing any limits on perfection.[63]

[63] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Perfection," 122.

METHODIST RELIGION AMONG THE SOLDIERS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Glen O'Brien

This article gives a description of the religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier during the American Civil War of 1861-1865. The "holy war" rhetoric that issued from home pulpits, along with the model of the pious Christian warrior provided through Christian officers and generals, enabled him to retain a distinctively Christian character in the midst of the stresses and moral dilemmas of war. From his chaplains he heard preaching that was simple, direct, focused squarely on spiritual concerns, and called for urgent decision. His expression of religious devotion, even given the differences along this line which existed between Northern and Southern revivals, was of a less emotional type than that in evidence in earlier frontier revivals. His devotion was marked by prayerful dependence upon God and a reliance on the bonds of Christian fellowship, as brothers fought side by side against a common enemy. The battlefield tended to reduce the theological conflicts that arose out of the relative luxury of a peace-time situation. The survivors of the war would go on to face an increasingly more religiously and ethnically diverse America, in which the relative monopoly of Methodist revivalism would crumble in the religiously diverse world of the "gilded age."

Introduction

Two major church historians have recently essayed to consider the religious and moral underpinnings of the American Civil War. Harry S. Stout's *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* has given us a rich and detailed description of wartime morality.[1] Mark Noll in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* examines the theological and scriptural justifications for the War and how differing interpretations on the issue of slavery could not be resolved resulting in a War contrary to the Christian gospel all parties claimed to proclaim.[2] These extended treatments provide a

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[1] Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

[2] Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

broad sweeping canvas of the religious and moral dimensions of what was arguably the most nation-defining of American military conflicts.

In this article I would like to focus the lens on the religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier on both sides of the conflict. In order to do this, I will begin with a brief description of events in the Methodist Episcopal Church leading up to the division into North and South of 1845. I will then examine "the rhetoric of war" issuing from the Methodist pulpit, which provided a particularly religious paradigm through which the ordinary Christian soldier might interpret the horrors of war. Also significant in this regard was the religious orientation of some of the military leaders, and the role of chaplains. Perhaps most significant of all was the revivalism from which many of the soldiers had come and into which many others were brought through revival measures employed in the meeting of their spiritual needs. In closing I will attempt to summarise my findings in order to obtain a description of Methodist religion as it operated among the troops.

This paper is only a preliminary piece that is hoped will lay the groundwork for a more extensive case study of the attitude to the Civil War in the pages of *The True Wesleyan*, the official publication of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion founded in 1843 on an explicitly abolitionist platform.[3] In that subsequent research I hope to resolve the question of whether an earliest pacifist stance among Wesleyan Methodists was replaced by the rhetoric of "holy war" in light of the national calamity. But for now I turn to Civil-War era Methodist religion in general.

Methodism and Slavery[4]

[3] The standard denominational history is Ira F. McLeister and Roy S. Nicholson, *Conscience and Commitment: The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* (Marion, Indiana: The Wesley Press, 1976). Excellent chapters on denominational history are included in Wayne E. Caldwell, ed. *Reformers and Revivalists: The History of the Wesleyan Church* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Wesley press, 1992). Particularly helpful in covering the early formation period is Lee M. Haines, "Radical Reform and Living Piety: The Story of Earlier Wesleyan Methodism, 1843-1867," in Caldwell, 31-117. For developments in the post-bellum Church see Haines, "The Grander Nobler Work: Wesleyan Methodism's Transition 1867-1901," in Caldwell, 118-149.

[4] Focus on this issue does not assume that slavery was the sole cause of the "War between the States" but certainly the War cannot be understood apart from it and it was the abolition of slavery that was the most crucial aspect of the dispute among Methodists.

In 1784, at Baltimore, Maryland, the Methodist Episcopal Church came into being and, in keeping with John Wesley's convictions in regard to slavery, passed a rule that all Methodists should free their slaves within one year. But the rule was not enforced to any great degree and by 1816, the General Conference had reached a level of compromise on the question. Though the Church declared itself to be "as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery" it now seemed to have lost hope in the possibility of eradicating it.[5] *The Committee on Slavery* reported to the Conference that year its conclusion that "under the present, existing circumstances in relation to slavery little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice."[6] By 1836, with the slavery issue proving to be a divisive one, threatening the unity of the visible Church, the General Conference held at Cincinnati, Ohio, was even able to issue a condemnation of abolitionism.

The South, with its "cotton culture," saw slavery spread rapidly and extensively. The Methodist Episcopal Church made concessions to slaveholders which increased its membership in the region and enabled the control of the denomination to rest in the hands of Southern clergy. By 1843 over 26,000 Methodists owned nearly 210,000 slaves, 1,200 of these being the "property" of preachers.[7]

Those in the Church who favoured abolition could not change the situation without changing the civil laws. Some states, such as North Carolina prohibited emancipation. In Georgia, an act of legislature was required before slaves could be emancipated. Virginia required that emancipated slaves must leave the state within a year of their emancipation or forfeit their freedom.[8] It is not surprising that in the face of such need for legislative changes many Methodists began to confine themselves to purely "spiritual" concerns within the existing status quo.

By 1844, only sixty years after the inaugural Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, Methodism was the largest Protestant church in America, with 1,068,000 members.[9] The

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[5] Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 302.
[6] Matthews, 28.
[7] Richard L. Troutman, ed. *The Heavens are Weeping: The Diaries of George Richard Browden 1852-1886* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 46.
[8] Matthews, 27-28.
[9] For the best study of American Methodism in its earlier period see Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an*

following year it would fragment into two denominations arrayed against each other on opposite sides of the slavery issue. Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia became, in 1844, the first Methodist Bishop to hold slaves, albeit "inherited" through marriage. Considerable protests were registered, particularly from Northern ministers. In 1845 the Conference formed a "Plan of Separation" should it be needed, and on May 2nd 1845, two days after the rise of the Conference, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formed in Louisville, Kentucky, the vote being carried by ninety-four to three.[10]

The Rhetoric of War

When the Civil War was entered into, it was, in one sense, a continuation, in the arena of the battlefield, of the theological and political battles which had been fought already for several years prior to the outbreak of military hostilities. These hostilities were often expressed in the form of opposing religious crusades, each claiming that God was on its side.

The Methodist pulpit was to become a platform, on both sides, for strong patriotic invectives which sought to depict the soldiers as engaged in a holy war and their opponents as apostate, or worse still, demonically inspired, forces. Bishop Matthew Simpson of Indiana, ex-president of Depauw University, who was described as "an apostle of patriotism," delivered an address on *The State of the Country* during hostilities. An Ohio minister who was present described the climax of the sermon in moving fashion - "We could see him holding up the tattered flag and addressing it. The effect was electrifying..."[11]

Evangelical Culture (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000). David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005) covers global Methodism in thorough yet succinct fashion, but gives no sustained attention to the Civil War. He does however make the interesting observation that "the feminization of missions in the last third of the nineteenth century was partly the product of the social changes occasioned by the American Civil War, not least the death and disability of large numbers of men..." Hempton, 159.

[10] Troutman, 47.

[11] Chester Forrester Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South 1860-1865* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 4-5. Simpson would later preach Lincoln's funeral oration, cp. William Warren Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, n.d. [c.1912]), 214-18.

The majority of Northern clergy pledged loyalty to the federal government displaying "an attitude of supreme hostility, disdain, and opposition toward the South."[12] Many preachers offered themselves for service in the cause of the Union's preservation, including the veteran circuit rider, Peter Cartwright. "Old as I am and stiff as I am," he declared, "I would shoulder my rifle now for the Union." One Northern minister, writing in the *Religious Herald* of 1862 wrote of the Southern ministers in a rather less than favourable light. "The most unmitigated set of villains they have in the South are the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian preachers...all talking secession...drinking mean liquor, and advocating the cause of Jefferson Davis and the devil."[13]

The civil religion of the American South was not committed to honouring the nation so much as to the preservation of state's rights, and the Southern way of life.[14] The Southern soldier did not fight just to hold on to his slaves, but in the cause of his own brand of patriotism, and in defence of his home. He also fought with a sense of divine sanction upon his cause, and a confidence, inspired by the power of the pulpit, that victory would be given to those whose cause was righteous. Biblical texts were often given a particularly local application. It was not uncommon to see the words of Isaiah written on battle flags, "I will say to the North, Give up; and to the south Keep not back!"[15]

> Such, indeed, was the violence of a separation in the years preceding the formation of the Confederacy that when the bugle calls sounded in Dixie, her preachers literally became ministers of flaming fire. It has been said that there is nothing more ferocious than a band of brigands led by vicious cutthroats, except it be a company of Scottish Presbyterians rising from their knees in prayer to do battle with the firm conviction that what they are about to do is the will of God. This storied zeal of the Highlander was to find its American counterpart in the inspired devotion of the embattled South.[16]

Both William W. Bennet in his *Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies* (1877) and John William

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[12] Dunham, 134.
[13] Charles F. Pitts, *Chaplains in Gray: The Confederate Chaplains' Story* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1957), 22.
[14] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980).
[15] Pitts, 37.
[16] Pitts, 20-21.

Jones in his 1887 work *Christ in the Camp*, selected Oliver Cromwell's soldiers as the closest to the Confederates "in religious motivation."[17]

The Methodist pastor, T.V. Moore, in a sermon preached at Nashville in 1870 couched his war rhetoric in distinctively religious terms. Religion always has inspired military prowess in battle, because a soldier who thinks his cause is that of God "will feel girded by more than human power, and shielded by a more than human protection, so that there shall descend upon him in the terrible shock of contending squadrons a baptism of fire that will nerve him to dare in the hour of peril what seems to mere human resources impossibilities." [18]

Christian Leadership in the Military

Both Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. Jackson were devout Christians who approached the task of warfare in an almost devotional manner. Jackson was a Presbyterian deacon and "a man of constant prayer."[19] Both men sought God's wisdom in prayer at every significant moment of decision. Lee called for a strict observance of the President's call to prayer and fasting among his troops. He had an easy familiarity with his troops which gave earned him great respect, not only as a military leader, but even as a kind of religious prophet, to whose cause the Christian soldier was glad to rally.

On one occasion Lee was assured by Chaplain B.T. Lacy of the prayers of his fellow chaplains on his behalf. His face flushed, tears came to his eyes and he answered, "Please thank them for that sir, - I warmly appreciate it. And I can only say that I am nothing but a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and need all of the prayers they can offer for me."[20] Pitt recounts another incident, with a rookie chaplain, which serves to illustrate both Lee's respect for the Church and his understanding of his men.

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[17] Wilson, 44.

[18] Wilson, 45. Moore's phrase "baptism of fire," when set against the backdrop of Holiness rhetoric, perhaps suggests the idea that combat could itself be seen as a sanctifying experience.

[19] Rev. J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp: or Religion in Lee's Army. Supplemented by a Sketch of the Work in the Other Confederate Armies* (Richmond: B. F. Johnson & Co., 1888), 88-9. Jones gives a sketch of ten other Christian officers, who were models of piety, 42-143.

[20] Jones, 50.

> [N]ot conversant with military terminology, [the rookie] understood the order for a parade in full dress uniform to mean that he should appear in the vestments of his communion. Accordingly, he put on his pure white robe of office and took his place in the ranks of his regiment. All around he could hear the soft laughter of the soldiers at the "green chaplain." However, it is reported that as his regiment passed in review, General Lee lifted his hat and said, "I salute the Church of God."[21]

No doubt such examples of the devout Christian warrior would serve to assuage the conscience of many who may have felt twinges of conscience regarding the ethics of war, or whose courage threatened to fail them in the heat of battle. They would also be a contributing factor to the success of revivals among the troops for, generally speaking, officers of both sides proved to be keen supporters of and participants in revival measures.

The Ministry of Chaplains

In both Federal and Confederate armies, Methodist chaplains were in the majority. This is probably not a reflection of their greater devotedness, but rather of the sheer numerical strength of the Methodist Episcopal Church at that time. William Warren Sweet lists 487 Methodist chaplains serving in the Union army.[22] Among the Confederates there were a hundred and forty-one Methodist officers and ordinary soldiers, and two hundred and nine chaplains.[23] Jones provides a list of chaplains from just two Confederate Corps (Hill's and Ewell's).[24] Of eighty-six chaplains, thirty-six were Methodists, twenty Baptists, twenty Presbyterian, six Episcopal, three Roman Catholic and one Lutheran. Four former Methodist chaplains would later become bishops - Enoch M. Marvin (1866), John C. Keener (1870), John C. Granberry (1882), and Atticus G. Haywood (1890).

The Reverend Lucius C. Matlack, a staunch Northern Methodist and abolitionist served three years in active service, first in a year of chaplaincy work, and later as a field officer of cavalry, "not

[21] Pitts, 61-62.
[22] Sweet, 138-39.
[23] Sweet, 222, 224.
[24] Jones, 358.

infrequently heading a charge of cavalry in line of battle."[25] The use of such an example is not to say that spiritual and military responsibilites were never experienced in tension. This is illustrated by the popular and humorous story of the Confederate chaplain who, in the heat of battle, took off his clerical coat and hat, laid them on the ground and said, "Now, lay there, sanctification, until we finish whipping these Yankees!"[26]

While still an active Methodist bishop, H.H. Kavanaugh served as chaplain to the Sixth Kentucky Regiment. Thomas Owens, of the Fourth Kentucky Regiment, described Kavanaugh's selfless labours among the troops.

> Many a time [have I] seen him trudging along on foot with the boys through the mud, leading his horse, ready to be used by the first footsore and exhausted comrade whose needs were made known to him. And thus he was ever ready to minister to the bodily as well as to the spiritual comfort of the men. Who can wonder that his influence for good was so potent among them?[27]

Georgian Bishop James O. Andrew, whose ownership of slaves had earlier sparked off the schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, wrote to chaplains in the Confederate Army, in a manner designed to be an advisory description of their duties:

> It may be that the circumstances which surround you may offer but few facilities for public preaching, but remember that the pulpit is not the only place where the faithful pastor will preach - in private, by the wayside, in the tent, in the hospitals by the bedside of the sick or wounded soldier; there especially is your place. Be much with the sick, wounded and dying - there, while life is ebbing out, when the past is painfully remembered, and the future looms up gloomily before the vision of the dying patriot, when he thinks of home and loved ones there, and feels that his earthly mission is almost ended, then preach Jesus to him, talk to him of the cross and pardon, and of heaven, and kneel beside him, and in the language of pleading, earnest faith, commend his departing spirit to the God who made him, and the exalted Redeemer who died for him, rose again and ever liveth to intercede for him, and then, when the vital spark is extinct, give him Christian burial.[28]

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[25] Lucius C. Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1881; 1969 reprint), 370-71. Matlack was one of the founders, in 1843, of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion.
[26] Pitts, 99.
[27] Pitts, 94.
[28] Pitts, 51.

Chaplains kept a personal record of their pastoral acts. Beside each soldier's and officer's name were columns listing his spiritual condition (either "Christian," "unsaved," or "backslider"), "the date that concern for his soul was noted, the date of conviction by the Holy Spirit, the date of his professed experience, a notation of witnesses to this profession, the account of his being accepted by the men of his chosen denomination for baptism, and a record of his baptism."[29]

In contrast to the frequently heard "war sermons" in pulpits back home, the average chaplain focused squarely on spiritual matters - the need for conversion and holiness.[30] Jones reports on the evangelical tone of the preaching and worship in the Confederate army.

> Chaplains...determined not to know anything among [the soldiers] save Jesus Christ and him crucified...[T]he grounds of the war were not discussed; constitutional and historical questions were passed by. The sermons in the camp would have suited any congregation in city and country, and with even less change might have been preached to the Union armies. Eternal things, the claims of God, the worth of the soul, the wages of sin...and the gift of God which is eternal life...these were the matters of preaching...The hearers were besought to immediate and uncompromising action for the time was short...There was no stirring up of bad blood; no inflaming of malice and revenge. The man of God lifted up, not the Bar and Star, but the Cross, and pressed the urgency, "Who among you is on the Lord's side?"[31]

It is not surprising that, in the light of this style of preaching, which in its directness and urgent appeal to decision has always been a preparation for and accompaniment to periods of spiritual awakening, we should see revivals break out among the troops. We turn now to a description of those revivals, and a further consideration of their contributing factors.

Revival Outbreaks

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[29] Pitts, 58.
[30] Gorrell Clinton Prim, Jr. *Born Again in the Trenches: Revivalism in the Confederate Army* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982), 7-10.
[31] Jones, 9-10.

In both Northern and Southern regiments, revival meetings were held during extended camps. One New York regiment held a thirty-day revival meeting during which one hundred and twenty-five soldiers professed conversion.[32] Though there were certainly times of spiritual awakening among the Northern troops, it was the Confederate armies which, perhaps in keeping with the unique character of Southern religion, would see the most intense revivals. The first took place in the Army of Northern Virginia in the winter of 1862-1863, following the Battle of Fredericksburg. This was followed by awakenings among the troops encamped along the Rapidan River in 1863-1864. In the closing months of the War further revivals took place along the lines from Richmond to Petersburg. A smaller revival took place in the Army of Tennessee, at Dalton, Georgia among General Joseph Johnston's troops. Anywhere between 15,000 and 50,000 troops were "born again" during the course of the War.[33]

After the Second Battle of Manassas, 23 August to 1 September, the Fall of 1862 was spent encamped at Bunker Hill. A chapel was built at the urging of General Paxton, and services were held there daily. By February of 1863 religious zeal was on the increase. Evangelists came to preach, group discussions followed services, and prayer meetings followed group discussions. Many were converted and baptized. The soldiers made large contributions to assist the citizens of Fredericksburg.[34]

S.M. Cherry's report to the Methodist Tract Society, in May of 1864 gives us a vivid picture of revival conditions.

> The army was in the midst of a most extensive revival at the beginning of the month. Protracted meetings were being held in almost every brigade; thousands of soldiers were thronging our crude camp altars, hundreds were nightly asking for certificates of Church membership. About three hundred were baptized on the first day of May, and the great work seemed to be growing in depth and interest all the while. Officers and privates were unusually serious and much impressed by the preaching of the Word, and bowed together at the place of prayer...Not less than five hundred professed to find peace in believing the first week of the month, and two thousand were publicly seeking salvation.[35]

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[32] Sweet, 140.
[33] Wilson, 6.
[34] Pitts, 13.
[35] Jones, 587.

It is interesting to note that the "barking and jerking exercises" and the fainting spells, so typical of earlier frontier camp meeting revivals were conspicuously absent from the Civil War revivals.[36] Perhaps the sobriety and awfulness of battle conditions placed a restraint on such outbursts. The 1857 Holiness Revival, under such Methodist notables as Phoebe and Walter Palmer had exhibited greater orderliness and calm than earlier revivals, such as those at Cane Ridge, and Red River. This type of Holiness revivalism exerted a continuing influence well into the War, and probably left its mark on Civil War revivals, particularly in the North.[37]

Causes of the Revivals

We have already noted the influence of Christian officers and chaplains, and their support for, and contribution to, "revival measures." It is also likely that the rhetoric of war which was heard from home pulpits before coming to the front served to enable the soldier to resist in considerable measure the moral laxity that war time situations invariably bring. Of course, this article deals with the Christian soldier, as one uniquely prepared to receive the spiritually invigorating effects of revivals. Southern ministers "portrayed the army as a carrier of the contagion of morality, and of evangelical Christianity. The clergy insisted that the typical Southern soldier came from a religious family and was...receptive to religious influences."[38] No doubt, many atrocities were committed by soldiers of both sides, as is the case in all wars, and unofficial marauders often wreaked havoc on the suffering populations. But these are not the subject of this research.

Benjamin Lacy lists a number of contributing factors ("instrumentalities") to the success of revivals among the troops.[39]

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[36] Prim, 14.

[37] On the Holiness movement in this period see Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1980); Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: the Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1876-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974); John Leland Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1985); Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform; American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[38] Wilson, 43.

[39] Benjamin Rice Lacy Jr. *Revivals in the Midst of the Years* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1943), 124-26.

In addition to godly officers, and chaplains, with which I have already dealt, he lists a number of other factors:

1. Letters from pastors and friends, many of which have been preserved and "breathe a spirit of devotion" and "an earnest solicitude for the spiritual well being of the soldier."[40]

2. Prayer meetings, which were well attended

3. Tract and Bible distribution. Printing presses sent a steady stream of literature to the front, until the record of a million pages a week was finally reached.[41]

Wilson adds a few other contributing causes:

1. Well organized denominational efforts to meet the spiritual needs of the troops.

2. The already devout character of the troops, many of whom had come from revivalist backgrounds.

3. The decline of confidence following losses in the second year of the war, and the constant threat of death.[42]

Prim's list, in addition to many of the factors already mentioned, includes:

1. The high level of co-operation in interdenominational work.

2. Hospital visitation by chaplains.

3. An initial sense of divine favour through early victories, and a corresponding call to repentance, prayer, and fasting, when subsequent defeats seemed to indicate the loss of the divine favour.

4. The organization of the army, which meant that zealous Christians would daily "rub shoulders" with unbelievers and the less committed.

5. Organizations specifically developed to meet the needs of the troops - Christian Associations (youth and young adult groups, somewhat like the Y.M.C.A.), and non-sectarian "Army Churches."[43]

The churches back home rallied in support of the soldiers on the field. Meetings for prayer and the practice of fasting were observed. A year into the war, President Jefferson Davis set apart Friday 28 February as a "day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer." He urged the people to "repair to the only Giver of all victory and [to] pray for His protection and favor for our beloved country, and that we may be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us."[44]

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[40] Lacy, 124.
[41] Pitts, 31.
[42] Wilson, 7.
[43] Prim, 19-44.
[44] Pitts, 35.

Prayer meetings among the troops were used with great success. President Lincoln, in an interview with a group of abolitionists, referred to the fervent prayers of the rebel soldiers. They prayed, he said, "with a great deal more earnestness, I fear, than our own troops, and expecting God to favour their side, for one of our soldiers, who had been taken prisoner, told Senator Wilson, a few days since, that he met with nothing so discouraging as the evident sincerity of those he was among in their prayers."[45] In addition to being sincere, these prayers were also seemingly well focused. The Confederate praying soldier was one who truly *prayed*. "He does not tell the Lord the news of the day, or recount to him the history of the country."[46]

In most Confederate regiments religious services were held daily. The day began with prayer and ended with either a prayer meeting or an evangelistic service. Either a layperson or a minister might conduct these services. "A Presbyterian chaplain from North Carolina wrote that sometimes they felt as if they were in camp meeting rather than in the army expecting to meet an enemy."[47]

Bibles and New Testaments flowed to the troops in a flood tide. The British and Foreign Bible Society, in response to an offer to purchase Bibles, donated free of charge, 15,000 Bibles, 50,000 New Testaments, and 250,000 copies of the Gospels and Psalms bound together.[48] Tracts came in even larger numbers. Lacy examined twelve tracts from the period, all of which had been published by the Methodist Tract Society. The titles of just a few are enough to indicate the response which they were intended to invoke: "The Soldier's Last Gift to His Mother"; "The Wounded, or A Time to Think"; "The Two Steps to Immediate Conversion"; "Repentance"; and "The Contrast - The Child of God versus the Child of the Devil."[49]

Generally speaking, the level of interdenominational co-operation in nineteenth century America was considerably higher than it has been at any time since (in spite of the emergence of the modern ecumenical movement). This was no more evident than during the Civil War, and was one of the significant contributing factors to the success of revivals. The Methodist missionary E.M. Marvin, who would later be elected to the episcopate in Tennessee

[45] Prim, 13.
[46] Wilson, 130.
[47] Pitts, 58.
[48] Lacy, 126.
[49] Lacy, 125.

helped to organize the "Army Church," an interdenominational fellowship, organized roughly along Methodist lines. This, along with similar organizations such as the "Christian Association," would become "a potent factor in preparing the way for and conserving the results of the great revival which swept through all the Southern armies."[50]

This is not to say that the old denominational "sticking points" were completely removed. On one occasion, a group of Primitive Baptists built a pool and a Baptist minister, "Brother Cochran," baptized all the Baptists while the Methodist, "Brother Jewell," baptized the Methodists. Some of the Methodists desired to be immersed and "Brother Jewell" obliged. Others knelt at the water's edge and received baptism by affusion (pouring). The Baptist preacher spoke no word of criticism, but he rushed to the water's edge to give each *immersed* Methodist a rigorous handshake, while completely ignoring those who had not been immersed. Jewell viewed it with amusement and said of Cochran, "He was one of the purest men we ever knew."[51] Baptismal services were often conducted in full view of the enemy's picket line with no shots being fired from that quarter. Both Federal and Confederate troops reciprocated this privilege.[52]

In addition to the orderliness of the 1857 Holiness Revival, mentioned above, the particularly Methodist form of revivalism was also known for its emphasis on prayer and its catholic spirit. It exhibited "no sectarian rivalry [and] continued to exert powerful influences after the war's outbreak. Estimates of its total number of converts have varied from 500,000 to well over 1 million."[53] The impact of the Palmer's brand of revivalism was felt most powerfully in the Northern states, but the Confederate preachers exhibited a similar generosity of spirit. According to one first hand impression, the Southern preacher in the camps "has no use for any theology that is *newer than the New Testament*, and he indulges in no fierce polemics against Christians of other denominations."[54] This relative freedom from denominational rivalries gave the revivals a chance to proceed without the stumbling blocks that might have occurred if

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[50] Pitts, 59.
[51] Pitts, 60.
[52] Pitts, 57.
[53] Keith J. Hardman, *Issues in American Christianity: Primary Sources with Introductions*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 165.
[54] Wilson, 130-31.

doctrinal distinctiveness had been rigidly maintained or enforced upon the new converts.

Of course *intra*denominational enmities, based as they were on North-South divisions, would remain during and for a long time after the War. "While the war was at its peak, Methodist... denominational leaders in the North had asked for, and received, orders from military commanders giving them power to depose pastors in occupied territory considered to be disloyal...This was also interpreted to permit the forcible ejection of pastors appointed to parishes by bishops of pro-Southern sentiment."[55]

Reluctant to admit defeat, the Southern spirit of defiance lived on in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South whose bishops issued a Pastoral Address in August of 1865 at Columbus, Georgia. "Whatever banner had fallen or been furled, that of Southern Methodism was still unfurled; whatever cause had been lost, that of Southern Methodism survived."[56]

Conclusion

From the preceding we are able to give some description of the typical religious experience of the ordinary Methodist soldier during the Civil War. The "rhetoric of war" that had issued from home pulpits, along with the model of the pious Christian warrior provided through Christian officers and generals, enabled him to retain a distinctively Christian character in the midst of the stresses and moral dilemmas of war. If he were a Confederate soldier he may have seen himself as engaged in a "holy crusade" to repel the Northern invader from his beloved homeland. If he were a Union soldier, he might have drawn upon a competing "holy war" vision, which saw the future of the nation depending on the abolition of the evil of slavery, in order that the United States might fulfil its "manifest destiny" as a light to the nations.

From his chaplains he heard preaching that was simple, direct, focused squarely on spiritual concerns, and called for urgent decision. After all, who knows but that the next charge or skirmish might be his last? The prospect of being shot down in the flower of youth, and leaving behind a grieving mother, to enter an uncertain eternity, provided the motivation for a positive response to the opportunity of making his peace with God. The genuine pastoral

[55] Pitts, 120-22.
[56] Pitts, 75.

concern of the chaplains, at his side when wounded and when dying, provided an authentication to their preaching, which might otherwise have been just another species of rhetoric.

His expression of religious devotion, even given the differences along this line which existed between Northern and Southern revivals, was of a less emotional type than that in evidence in earlier frontier revivals. Perhaps the unavoidable horrors of war contributed to this more sombre approach. The expectation of death has a tendency to eliminate from religious experience all that is frivolous or extraneous, and to bring about a deep and serious piety. This devotion is marked by prayerful dependence upon God and a reliance on the bonds of Christian fellowship, as brothers fought side by side against a common enemy.

War also tends to reduce the theological conflicts that arise out of the relative luxury of the peace-time situation. Denominational chaplains, and ordinary Christian laymen in uniform, could agree to disagree more readily when salvation seemed the paramount concern. Overemphasis on confessional distinctions is more likely to arise in the theological seminary or the home parish than on the bloody field of a Gettysburg or a Fredericksburg. The soldier could respond to a simple message in heartfelt repentance, and along with his fellows could be given an opportunity to pray, and to worship, and even to preach, "as a dying man to dying men."

In the theological reflection of such postbellum thinkers as Philip Schaff and Horace Bushnell, Methodists played their part in making that great sacrifice whereby the nation was reborn and, in the mingling of Northern and Southern blood, its unity "cemented and forever sanctified."[57] The survivors of the war would go on to face an increasingly more religiously and ethnically diverse America, in which the monopoly of Methodist revivalism would crumble and it would become but one of many options in the urbanized religious supermarket of "the gilded age."

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[57] Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 177.