Baptistic Theologies

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Despise not the Counsel of the Poor:
Convictions on Religious Freedom, the Power of States and the State of the Powers

1612 marks the 400th anniversary of the first publication of Thomas Helwys' book *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, often cited as the first publication to address issues of religious freedom.

To celebrate this the Thomas Helwys Centre for Religious Freedom is holding a conference from 30 January to 3 February 2012 at IBTS in Prague. The provisional title of our conference comes from Helwys' dedicatory handwritten note to the King, where he calls on the King to allow freedom of conscience for all his subjects. Since then freedom of religion has been a key Baptist conviction.

In the conference questions will be addressed, such as:

- What does this conviction mean today and what are the theological grounds for it?

- How are we called to witness to the State, and what practical and theological tools do we have to help us?

- What are the practical and theological threats to religious freedom today?

- What are the implications for the life and mission of the church today of a commitment to religious freedom?

- Is this an ultimate freedom and if not, what are its limits?

We welcome submissions for papers on the theme of this conference. Please contact, in the first instance, Dr Tim Noble, co-director of the Thomas Helwys Centre on tnoble@ibts.eu

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Editorial

For some years now, the study of the importance of convictions as the driving force behind theological production has been a major interest at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. With many students working with the ideas of one of the leading proponents of this idea, James McClendon, it is perhaps not surprising that we have thought it worth reflecting more deeply on the nature of such convictions.

In the papers collected in this issue, we focus essentially on two issues. One is on the nature of convictions themselves, as they play out in doing theology. What kinds of convictions do we have as theologians, how do we seek to articulate our faith convictions in a coherent and intelligible fashion, so that others can engage with us in dialogue and discussion? This is something which is both true for each one of us in our individual work, but also it is equally important in and for the communities to which we belong.

Linked to this question, and even more important, is another. Our convictions are never lightly held, and therefore never easily surrendered. That is perhaps their strength, but it is also their undoubted weakness. History contains all too many examples of the victims of someone else's convictions, that one nation or race or people is superior to another, or has the right to a piece of land, or some other material occupied and possessed by the other.

Convictions, then, are dangerous, but in some of the essays in this volume of *Baptistic Theologies* we consider what might be the most dangerous aspect of all. This occurs when our convictions are held in what we might call at all levels good faith. We truly and deeply believe that they are right, and in as far as it is possible to tell, they are right. And yet, convictions themselves are not their own object. I am convinced about something, and it is that object of my conviction – in the case of faith, of course, God Himself – that is most important.

Yet, it is all too easy to make our convictions ends in themselves, so that the convictions are raised to the level of a kind of divinity, and God is left out of the picture. This is what we have in mind by talking about ideologies in this volume. An idea or conviction that should be open-ended, leading us on towards God, becomes closed in on itself and becomes to all intents and purposes an object of worship. So we try to look at how to

avoid this happening and what to do with our convictions so that they remain good and help us to stay on the path towards God, rather than obstacles on the path.

Among other things, the papers gathered here will also present to our readers some of the areas of research which staff, adjunct faculty, students and former students of IBTS are involved in. In doing this, they can demonstrate the strength of our own convictions that a theological reading of the lives and practices of the different church and social communities in which we live is a vital contribution to the lives and well-being of these communities.

Because it will give even wider access to this important work, we are therefore also happy to report that *Baptistic Theologies* will also now be available through ATLA, giving theologians and other interested readers around the world the chance to share in and react to our work, and join our community of readers and contributors.

Finally, we are very grateful to Joshua Searle for his work on sub-editing several of the papers in this collection, and to Mary Raber for her sub-editing work on this and other issues of *Baptistic Theologies*.

Doc. Dr Parush Parushev and **Dr Tim Noble**

The Shaping of Christian Convictions and the Avoidance of Ideology: Paul's Contribution to a Vexing Issue in 1 Corinthians

Rollin G. Grams

Abstract

This article examines the problem of ideology in theology through an examination of Paul's thought on the issue in 1 Corinthians. It offers a brief introduction to the nature of ideology in general, before presenting the Corinthian church's own ideological behaviour. It then suggests three ways in which Paul responds to this ideologising attempt of the Corinthian community by addressing questions concerning the place of apostolic unity in theological study, the place of Biblical interpretation in theological study (including a more detailed examination of 5:1-13 in its Old Testament context), and the place of a Christological hermeneutic in theological study, before finishing with conclusions based on the approach of tradition enquiry.

Key words: Ideology; Paul; 1 Corinthians; apostolic unity; Biblical hermeneutic; Law; Christology; Tradition enquiry

Introduction

This essay addresses the problem of ideology in theological enquiry and discourse by examining Paul's contribution to this vexing issue in 1 Corinthians. I will briefly consider the problem as we face it in our Western postmodern context and then explore how 1 Corinthians is a relevant case study of the issue for us today. I will then draw conclusions from this study about how we might avoid ideology in theological study.

Ideology in Our Times

Many in the postmodern West believe that ideology is no longer possible.[1] For them, the social function of knowledge, the analysis of the efficacy of discourse, has replaced epistemology, the analysis of how we know what is true. Society has, in Jean-François Lyotard's terms, re-oriented itself to the *denotative game* of identifying what is true and what is false and to the *prescriptive game* of identifying what is right and what is wrong. It is turning away from the *technical game* of determining what is efficient and

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[1] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. xi. He writes, 'If the 'end-of-ideology' theorists viewed all ideology as inherently closed, dogmatic and inflexible, postmodernist thought tends to see all ideology as teleological, 'totalitarian' and metaphysically grounded. Grossly travestied in this way, the concept of ideology obediently writes itself off.' (p. xii).

inefficient.[2] The new game is *postmodern*. Its salient characteristics are legitimacy determined by *paralogy* (instead of consensus) and *local argumentation* (discussed below). The so-called 'postmodern condition' involves an 'incredulity towards metanarratives',[3] a rejection of any powerful or totalising narrative by which life must be lived.

Yet, if John B. Thompson's definition of 'ideology' is adopted, one may immediately see that the notion is applicable just as much to postmodernity as whatever has come before. He says, "to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination."[4] Meaning may be found in such symbolic forms as actions, utterances, images, and texts.[5] The use of such by individuals or groups to establish or sustain their dominance over others is what Thompson understands as ideology.

Lyotard seeks to avoid ideology through a postmodern language game. For him, the dominance of a particular system can be overcome in two ways. First, he avers, domination of some system of thought can be overcome through 'paralogy', allowing diverse voices to speak without seeking consensus. Second, domination may be overcome by insisting that language games are 'local', played by players who tentatively agree on the rules for a particular time and in a particular space. In this way, he expects to avoid totalising discourse: "…the temporary contract is in practice supplanting permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family, and international domains, as well as in political affairs."[6] However, this postmodern deconstructivism is itself ideological. It creates a 'politically correct' view of discourse that requires all discourse to be tentative and non-consensual. If it is not, it is viewed as dominating discourse. But by shutting down anyone who purports to have come to a knowledge of the truth, it is ideological.

The Corinthian Church's Theologising and the Postmodern Game

Some scholars have already recognised the similarity between what was taking place in the Corinthian church and what I will call a 'postmodern ideology'. The parallels can be explored apart from any examination of

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[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984; French, 1979), p. 46.

[3] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* p. xxiv.

[4] John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 56.

[5] Thompson, *Ideology*, p. 58.

[6] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 66.

postmodernity as a response to modernity.[7] Stephen Pogoloff paved the way for this discussion in his Duke University dissertation.[8] As Anthony Thiselton summarises Pogoloff's point, "… while the concern for *facts, truth, and rationality* remain central to the more "classical" Roman attitudes of Cicero and Quintilian, the reductive and contrived "instrumental" rationality and rhetoric *which looks not for truth but for applause and success* characterizes more readily the kind of competitive rhetoric which was most highly prized at Corinth."[9] Thiselton also draws attention to similar ('postmodern') characterisations of the diverse approaches of Corinth and the Corinthian church's theologising on the one hand and Paul's theologising on the other in Bruce Winter, J. D. Moores, and Ben Witherington.[10] He concludes,

> With today's 'postmodern' mood we may compare *the self-sufficient, self-congratulatory culture of Corinth coupled with an obsession about peer group-prestige, success in competition, their devaluing of tradition and universals, and near contempt for those without standing in some chosen value system. All this provides an embarrassingly close model of a postmodern context for the gospel in our own times, even given the huge historical differences and distances in so many other respects.*[11]

The parallel with postmodernity today is in the rhetorical, sophistic concern with performance, persuasion, and success over against reason.

The Corinthian church's theologising entailed a local argumentation, an engagement with and use of their context to develop what were in fact erroneous theological and ethical views.[12] Examples of these include the

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[7] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame, 1990). MacIntyre even avoids the term 'postmodern' and so allows its characteristics to be identified apart from any temporal arrangement of Western thought. He represents 'Genealogy' by the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, but his point is that it is a version of enquiry in its own right. I have followed this argument in *Rival Versions of Theological Enquiry* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

[8] Stephen Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series* 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

[9] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 14.

[10] Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* (SNTSMS) 96 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-15 and 126-202; J. D. Moores, *Wrestling with Rationality in Paul,* SNTSMS 82 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10, 5-32, 132-160; Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 20-21.

[11] Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 16-17 (italics his).

[12] James D. G. Dunn provided an overview in 'Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians,' in *Christianity at Corinth: the Quest for the Pauline Church*, eds. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2004), ch. 22. I would agree with Gordon Fee that the errors addressed in 1 Corinthians stem mostly from a non-Christian, Gentile background. See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Commentary New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 14. I would disagree only on the question of whether

value placed on rhetoric and philosophical wisdom (ch. 3), the view that ethics does not include the body (sex, ch. 5; 6.12ff; food, chs. 8, 10; future resurrection body, ch. 15), their practices of seeking higher status (knowledge, ch. 8; class distinctions at the Lord's Table, 11.17ff), and boasting publicly (1.31; 3.21; 4.7; 5.6; cf. 9.15f; 13.4),[13] litigating to establish their reputation over others,[14] temple dining (1 Cor. 8.1-10.22), and using prostitutes (1 Cor. 6.12-20). The church also apparently misappropriated the theology of Paul, Cephas, and Apollos to produce some faulty theology of its own.[15] One notable example is in the community's realized eschatology, that is, the view that all God's blessings are present and nothing remains for the future (cf. Paul's irony in 4.8— 'already you have all you want!').[16]

Thus 1 Corinthians provides us with a tantalising example of a community's theologising and its founder's criticism of what the community produced.

How Paul Undermines Ideology
Three general comments about Paul's response to the church's approach to shaping its convictions are of relevance to the present concern to avoid ideological constructions in theology.

1. The Place of Apostolic Unity in Theological Study
First, the church's theologising had become factional. Groups in Corinth formed around absent 'theologians' such as Paul, Cephas, and Apollos (1

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there were parties representing different views in Corinth. Paul commends some members as examples in the church (15.15-18) over against his strong criticism of the church in general, distinguishes the strong from the weak in the church, opposes a status division over fellowship at the Lord's table, notes that 'some' say there is no resurrection from the dead (15.12), and opposes those going to prostitutes as well as those opposed to sex within their marriages—surely different groups. Yet Paul says nothing to allow us to understand how these divisions might fall into certain groupings, which is likely more Fee's point.

[13] Cf. the discussion in Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, pp. 8ff, with reference to J. H. Kent, *Corinth—Inscriptions 1926-1950 Corinth: Results viii, Part III* (Princeton: ASCSA, 1966). Corinth's inscriptions suggest a city with persons climbing in social status and boasting of their contributions. Andrew D. Clarke argues that some members of the Corinthian church were elite members of society: *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993).

[14] See Andrew Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, ch. 5. Not only justice, but establishing one's reputation in the courts at the expense of others seems to have been the practice (see p. 68). Paul's advice in 1 Cor. 6.1-11 is intended to reverse this practice.

[15] Yet it is also very difficult to determine in what ways. We should avoid identifying 'Cephas' with anything Jewish, Apollos with anything to do with rhetorical skill, and Paul with anything to do with freedom from the Law or eschatology. The bottom line is that we haven't the evidence to conclude anything. Yet following lines of thought from key theologians and forming schools of thought associated with one or another such scholar instead of keeping the biblical text as the focus for theological study seems to be a consistent error throughout Church history.

[16] Cf. the classic essay (1978) on this by Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Realized Eschatology at Corinth,' in *Christianity at Corinth,* ch. 7.

Cor. 1.11f; 3.4), whose words were being used to warrant a variety of convictions and practices that, there is every reason to believe, would not have been approved by the theologians, or mentors, were they able to continue in the discourse. To rectify this, Paul sends Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ (4.17) and writes a letter. He urges Apollos to return to Corinth to set straight the faction formed around him and to address those opposing him (16.12). Paul's solution, in part, is to unify the church by reconnecting it to its mentors who, Paul knows, are themselves united rather than divided (3.6). Undoubtedly, the content of Paul's letter is also intended to re-establish unity in the church.

If the mentors are united, then the Corinthian factionalism that involved identifying with this or that mentor (1.12; 3.4) must stem from misconstruing various teaching that they had heard from them. That is, Paul does not endorse a program of 'generative theologising,' whereby the community has its own authority to construe initial teaching however they wish. What he instead calls for is a return to hear the teaching clearly. Our equivalent today would be to return to the authors of the New Testament to be sure that we have heard them correctly and to submit our theological views and ethical practices to what they have stated.

Another wrong approach would be to turn theologising into an interpretation of a single theologian and to explore how to apply him or her to new issues arising for the community. One sure way to turn community discourse into ideology is to insist upon a particular scholar's lens for our community to read the scriptures. A lens is useful only to the extent that it aids in seeing the biblical text, and it is critiqued when it fails in this regard.

The cliques that formed around Paul, Cephas, and Apollos were problematic for Paul. Was this because they should have formed around one particular theologian, such as Paul himself? In practice, theology frequently takes this path, as when a particular scholar or cleric is elevated to the status of the oracle at Delphi. Rather sadly, we see students of theology forming into Corinthianesque cliques under the names of 'Calvin,' 'Luther,' 'Wesley,' 'Barth,' 'Scofield,' 'McClendon,' 'McArthur,' 'Piper,' and the like. Paul's answer to the Corinthians, however, is to insist that there is not one dominating voice for the community. Rather, there are various planters and waterers in God's field (ch. 3). They are, in fact, unified insofar as they preach Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2.2).

Paul's response to the Corinthian situation entails seeking consensus without requiring the community to recognise a single spokesperson for the

truth. Instead, he insists that there is unity between himself, Cephas, and Apollos. There are, however, criteria for this unity that will be explored in the next two points. Moreover, Paul does not approve of diverse theologies on significant matters. He allows for diversity on matters of indifference for the unity of the church, such as eating food sacrificed to idols (10.23ff) or circumcision (7.18f). He encourages diverse spiritual gifts in the church for the unity of the church (12-14). Nevertheless, he is willing to divide the church over significant matters (ch. 5). That is, Paul's theological language game fully accepts denotative games over fact and fiction. For instance, he argues from the fact of Jesus' resurrection to the fact of a future resurrection for those in Christ (ch. 15). Furthermore, Paul's theological language game fully accepts prescriptive games over right and wrong. For example, he states flatly that those who do the things listed in 1 Cor. 6.9-10 will not inherit the kingdom of God. He also approves of technical language games over what is efficient, as when he states, 'not everything is advantageous' and 'I will not be dominated by anything' (6.12).

Consequently, those who wish to read the scriptures today purely from a postmodern language game of paralogy and local argumentation will either misconstrue Paul's words or read them antagonistically. In either case, the community opens itself up to an ideological practice of theology. Thinking itself to prevent Paul's, or the Bible's, functioning as a dominating authority in theology, the community establishes itself in that role. Catholics, Dispensationalists, Calvinists, Arminians, Lutherans, feminists, Barthians, Bultmannians, or devotees of some lesser known theologian or other—all open themselves up to ideology until they submit their cherished theological schemes to the wider counsel of the apostles. That wider counsel, the church has agreed, is to be found in the canon of the scriptures. A sure path to ideological teaching of theology is to lift up a certain theologian's views or theological system as an alternative canon.

2. The Place of Biblical Interpretation in Theological Study
The Corinthian church's theologising lacked biblical interpretation as part of theological study. When reading Galatians or Romans, one sees that Paul's arguments engage and anticipate debates over textual interpretations, Jewish and Christian. Such letters read as debates on the correct interpretation of texts. This is not the case with 1 Corinthians. Paul quotes from the Corinthians' letter to him, and in no case is there in it a question of the interpretation of texts. Instead, their theologising is encapsulated in slogans, such as 'food for the stomach and the stomach for food' (1 Cor. 6.13), 'everything is permitted' (1 Cor. 6.12; 10.23), and 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' (1 Cor. 7.1).

Each of these slogans Paul critiques with a biblical interpretation.[17] (1) In response to the slogans of 1 Cor. 6.12 and 13, Paul examines the relevance of Gen. 2.24. (2) In response to 1 Cor. 7.1, Paul's earlier interpretation of Gen. 2.24 remains in focus: marriage between a man and a woman is God's plan (so Gen. 2.18). In 1 Cor. 7, Paul concedes that there are reasons to forego sexual relations and/or marriage in certain circumstances (for a period of time for prayer (7.5), if someone has a gift of celibacy (vv. 7-9), when a believer divorces another believer (vv. 10-11),[18] in mixed marriages where the unbelieving spouse wants a divorce (vv. 12-24),[19] or when tribulation looms and threatens one's undivided devotion to God (vv. 25-35). Nevertheless he does not contradict his previous exegesis. He concludes by affirming marriage (to a believer, v. 39) and insisting that marriage is for life (v. 39; cf. vv. 10-11—the conclusion follows from Gen. 2.24). (3) Finally, in 1 Cor. 10.26, Paul counters the Corinthians' slogan (10.23) with Psalm 24: 'the earth and its fullness are the Lord's.'

What is even more surprising to many is the fact that Paul's use of the scriptures in moral discourse includes a robust, extensive, exegetical use of the Mosaic Law.

That the discourse of theology in this early Christian community omitted any references to the law is perhaps only to be expected, since their theological thinking revolved around authority/freedom. It may also be an example of their misunderstanding of Paul's critique of the ongoing validity of the Law in ways we cannot explore here. Whatever Paul's views, his use of the Law in 1 Corinthians means that he viewed the Law as God-given guidance for righteous living.

Even scholars in recent times have misconstrued Paul's comments on the law of Moses as antinomian. Towards the end of the 19th century, Adolf von Harnack believed that Paul 'designedly severed the gospel from the Jewish national religion and proclaimed the Christ as the *end* of the Law,'

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[17] Cf. Moores, *Wrestling with Rationality in Paul*, p. 10: Paul's response to the Corinthians involves appeals to the scriptures and appeals to reason.

[18] Paul says that believers should not divorce one another, but if this should happen, they should not remarry. In such a case, divorce would mean foregoing marriage and sexual relations.

[19] Paul's main point in these verses is against divorcing an unbelieving spouse, but again, by way of concession, if the unbeliever wants to leave the believing spouse should not resist. Possibly Irenaeus is right that the logic for this argument derives from Hosea's marriage of a prostitute and the name of his son coming from this marriage being reversed from 'Not a people' to 'Children of the living God' (Hos. 1.6-9) (*Against Heresies* 4.20.11)—as noted by Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, p. 531. Here we would then have a further use of the Old Testament in Paul's argument. Certainly his thinking about what makes something holy is an Old Testament way of thinking about the matter of a mixed marriage.

and the Old Testament religion was 'done away with.'[20] Paul's thorough working out of the Gospel as a universalistic religion, in Harnack's view, supplanted the Old Testament religion, which came to be seen as a primitive religion. Harnack continues,

> … in the second century, the rejection of the Old Testament would have been a mistake and the great Church rightly refused to make that mistake; the retention of it in the sixteenth century was due to a fatal legacy from which the Reformation was not yet able to withdraw; but for Protestantism since the nineteenth century to continue to treasure it as a canonical document is the result of a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.[21]

Others in the 20th century have failed to see Paul's detailed use of the Law in his letters. One may cite R. G. Hammerton-Kelly, for example, with his claim that the Law of Moses 'played no constructive role' in Paul's ethics.[22]

However, as Brian Rosner has incontrovertibly demonstrated with respect to 1 Corinthians 5-7, Paul's ethical arguments depend upon a thoroughgoing and meticulous use of the Mosaic Law. The following table, following Rosner, demonstrates Paul's use of the Old Testament, the Law in particular, in 1 Cor. 5 (the table also shows parallels to Jewish literature).[23]

5.1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans*; for a man is living with his father's wife* [NRSV and following].	*Dt. 12.29-31; 1 Ki. 14.24; 2 Ki. 21.9, 11; Amos 1, 2 *Lev. 18.8, 20.11; Dt. 23.1; 27.20; mSan. 7.4; 9.1 mKer. 1.1; tSan. 10.1; Jub. 33.10-13, etc.
2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned,* so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?	*Ezra 10.6; Neh. 1.4; 1 Esd. 8.72; 9.2; Dn. 10.2

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[20] Adolf von Harnack, *Outlines of the History of Dogma*, trans. E. K. Mitchell (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893), p. 12.

[21] Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion, das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich's Verlag, 1924), p. 217, as quoted in *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height, The Making of Modern Theology: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Texts,* ed. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1988), p. 29.

[22] R. G. Hammerton-Kelly, 'Sacred Violence and "Works of the Law": "Is Christ then an Agent of Sin?' (Galatians 2.17),' *CBQ* 52 (1990) 55-75; see p. 74. A list of scholars finding little to no use of the Law in Paul can be found in Brian Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 3-7.

[23] Brian Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, pp. 92f.

3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment*	*2 Sam. 12
4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled,* and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus,	*Deut. 19.16-20; Num. 15.35; 35.24; Lev. 24.14, 16; 1QS 6-7
5 you are to hand this man over to Satan* for the destruction of the flesh,* so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*	*Job 2.1 *Deut. 27.20 [NB Temple: 1 Cor. 3.16-17; Dt. 23.1-8] *mSan. 6.2; CD 12.4-6; 1 QS 7
6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?	
7 Clean out* the old yeast* so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.*	*Ju. 20.13 *Ex. 12.15; 13.7 *Deut. 4.20
8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival,* not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.	*2 Chron. 29.30; 35.1-19; 2 Ki. 23.1-23; Ezra 6.13-22
9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate* with sexually immoral persons--	*Hos. 7.8; Ez. 20.18
10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world.	
11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral* or greedy,* or is an idolater,* reviler,* drunkard,* or robber.* Do not even eat* with such a one	*Deut. 22.21 *Deut. 24.7 *Deut. 13.5; Deut 17.7 *Deut. 19.19 *Deut 21.21 *Deut 24.7 *Ps. 101.5
12 For what have I to do with judging	

those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge?	
[13] God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."*	*Deut 13.5; 17.7; 19.9; 21.21; 22.21; 24.7

As Rosner has noted, many assume that Paul's theology of grace is incommensurable with any use of the Mosaic Law for Christian ethics. Yet, in his letter to the Corinthians that dates *between* the two main letters in which Paul critiques the Law, Galatians and Romans, he makes thorough use of the Law. Paul is not severing Christianity from Judaism, neither is he being inconsistent in his statements about and use of the Law. Rather, his critique of the Law is in regard to certain uses of it. His own use of the Law demonstrates that it remains a concrete guidance in matters of righteousness for the Christian community.

Paul's use of the Law, as already noted, stands over against the absence of the use of either the scriptures or the Law among the Corinthians—as far as we can tell. He meets their text-less, Law-less discourse with his careful interpretation of the biblical text.

While much is made today of the possibility of interpreting texts in different ways and of the view that authors lose control to their readers of the meaning of texts that they have written,[24] Paul, on the contrary, accepts that Christian reasoning is in part a matter of interpreting authoritative texts—the scriptures. The community does not control the meaning of the texts; it seeks the right interpretation of those texts and then submits to their authority.[25]

The perspective that the scriptures are uniquely authoritative and divinely inspired is a view found throughout the New Testament writers, and it can be found throughout the patristic period—it is neither a view of the scriptures developed to shut down alternative theologies nor a modern conviction developed over against challenges to the accuracy of the Bible.[26]

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[24] Probably the most wide-ranging yet detailed survey of this can be found in Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997). Perhaps much is made of this in part because people incorrectly assume that these hermeneutical views can overcome ideological theologizing.

[25] Even David Kelsey (*The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975)), with his functional approach to the use of the scriptures over against seeing them as intrinsically authoritative, accepts that the scriptures (along with community and tradition) exercise a constraint on theological 'imagination' (pp. 170-175).

[26] Modernistic expressions of the scriptures' authority can and do become ideological, as when the authority of the scriptures, their divine origin, and their being free from error and non-contradictory is pressed into a hermeneutic that insists on particular interpretations of the text, its authorship, dates, etc. But this is not the issue in the apostolic and patristic periods.

For example, Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, speaks of the 'Holy Spirit of prophecy' (ch. 32), of a psalm being 'dictated to David by the Holy Spirit' (ch. 34), and expresses his conviction that no scripture contradicts another (65). Thus the text as divine revelation is a text like no other and must be the focus of theological study. As Augustine says,

> I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the[manuscript] is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it. As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason (Augustine, *Letter to Jerome* 82.3).[27]

Whenever scholars shift the focus from biblical interpretation to other concerns, however laudable, they open theology up to aggressive and totalising forces. Ideological readings of the scriptures occur when someone or ones make the text read something other than what it does in order to establish themselves, their doctrines, and their practices over the text. Theology as biblical interpretation continuously levels the field against such dominions of power.

3. The Place of a Christological Hermeneutic in Theological Study

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul turns an argument around by reflecting on what difference the cross of Christ makes for theologising. In so doing, he concretises arguments that otherwise appeal to vague generalities.[28] Among the Corinthian church's vague values and virtues were wisdom (1 Cor. 2) and knowledge (1 Cor. 8.1), possession of certain spiritual gifts simply for the exercise of spiritual power (such as speaking in tongues: 1 Cor. 12-14), and freedom.

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[27] *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1: *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine, with a Sketch of His Life and Work,* ed. P. Schaff (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886). Trans. of the Letters by J. G. Cunningham.

[28] I have elsewhere argued that the cross contradicts abstract theologizing in Liberalism and Islam. See 'God, the Beneficent--the Merciful, and Jesus's Cross: From Abstract to Concrete Theologising,' in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, ed. D. Singh (Oxford: Regnum/Paternoster, 2008), pp. 157-166.

The Greek word '*exousia*' and its cognates, found thirteen times in 1 Corinthians, carry the meanings of both 'authority' and 'freedom': one who has authority to do something is free to do it. This sort of thinking was precisely what Paul counters in 1 Corinthians: he says, 'Watch lest this authority/freedom of yours becomes a stumbling block for the weak' (1 Cor. 8.9). In 1 Cor. 5, Paul addresses the case of a man living with his father's wife, and in 1 Cor. 6.12ff we learn that the Corinthian argument is that moral laws do not apply to the body. This freedom from moral restraint is lauded by the Corinthian community.[29] In 1 Cor. 6, Paul observes that the pursuit of rights has led to a litigious community; rather, he asks, 'Why not rather be wronged, why not rather be defrauded?' (v. 7). In 1 Cor. 9, Paul establishes his 'rights' only to disavow them. And in 1 Cor. 10.23-33, Paul sets whatever is better for the other over his own good (vv. 24, 33). In 1 Cor. 11, women's dress and the community's meals are restricted in ways that will acknowledge others rather than affirm one's own '*exousia*'.

In all this, Paul's hermeneutic is Christ, who became *our* wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1.30). The cross of Christ unravels whatever serves to establish and maintain relationships of domination. By understanding divine power to be in the cross (1.22-24), of all things!, the content of Paul's theology undermines ideology.

The hallmark of Liberal (modernist) theology is its dealing in theological abstractions. It continuously moved away from the concrete, such as reading the scriptures contextually, to the abstract, by not understanding Jesus in his Jewish context but as a teacher of universal, general truths, by moving theology from its Christological focus to speaking only of God, by distancing mission from the Church to seeing God at work in other religions, by avoiding Christian propositions and instead searching for a religious experience, and so forth. With postmodernity's rejection of idealist philosophy and searching for contextual truth in the particular narratives of a given community, one might expect a return to concrete theologising. Postmodernity fears making this return, however, lest a particular narrative become a totalising metanarrative, shutting off alternatives. Hence it opts for paralogy and local constructions.

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[29] Commentators discuss alternatives to this interpretation. My view is that, since the church has not acted to discipline the man living with his father's wife, since there is sexual immorality in the church (6.9, 15), since the church has argued that sexual behaviour is not a moral issue (6.12f), and since a driving conviction in their theologising is freedom, their pride includes being proud that a member is exercising such license with respect to social norms.

For Paul, the issue is not whether there is a right story by which to live; indeed, he affirms that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the one and only such story. Rather, the postmodern concern is met in Paul by the *kind* of story that the Gospel is: it is not a story of dominion but of the cross. Only this story undermines the totalising stories by which the rest of the world lives.[30]

A sure path to ideological teaching of theology is to understand theology as careful description of theological views, extending theological ideas, applying theology to discipleship and the practice of ministry (practical theology, mission practice, counselling, homiletics, etc.), *without* establishing Christ as the hermeneutic for theologising and scriptural interpretation.

Alternatively, theologising that proceeds by way of interpreting the scriptures and that focuses on Christ are ways to avoid either abstract theologising or unending, tentative play with local, communal constructions of theology. By way of example, preaching that is narrative, topical, or focuses on the big idea of a text may be excellent in many ways, but to the extent that it asks listeners to follow the rhetoric without attending to the process of interpreting the biblical text or to the use of the Christological lens that brings our thinking into focus, it opens itself up to ideological practice. The persuasive speaker is able to persuade not because his or her interpretation is faithful to the biblical text or because the sermon is Christological but because of the speaker's rhetorical and logical skills. This is precisely what Paul warns against in 1 Cor. 2. His antidote there is Christ-centred preaching (vv. 2, 8, 16).

Conclusion

What has been discussed in this essay is an example of 'tradition enquiry,' as proposed by Alisdair MacIntyre.[31] His description of tradition enquiry and my adaptations of the points, in parentheses, may function as a conclusion to this essay. Tradition enquiry, if followed in this way, offers a way to avoid ideological forces in theology.

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[30] Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003). The biblical *metanarrative*, argues Bauckham, is *true*, but in a way that opens up an alternative to modernity and postmodernity. For truth to be claimed as true it must be claimed not by force but by *witness*. The notion of witness has these virtues: (1) it answers the postmodern suspicion that metanarratives are oppressive because it is non-coercive (note the significance of witnessing to the *cross*); (2) it 'must be a lived witness involving the whole of life and even death'; (3) as a witness 'it can show itself to be not self-serving' (p. 99); and (4) witness can 'mediate the particularity of the biblical story and the universality of its claim' (p. 100). In a postmodern age more than ever (but this was already true in 1 Corinthians), mission entails telling the particular stories of the Bible in such a way that they expose aggressive metanarratives, globalization in particular (pp. 101f).

[31] Alisdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. See my discussion in *Rival Versions of Theological Enquiry*, pp. 35-39.

1) Tradition enquiry is perceived as requiring a prior commitment to a certain perspective (not paralogy or local argumentation but a commitment to scriptural and Christological theologising).
2) Tradition has a narrative view of history (biblical narratives find their climax in the Gospel story of Jesus Christ and him crucified).
3) Tradition locates authority in (a) a given *community* (the church), (b) in authoritative *texts* (the scriptures), and (c) in a *tradition of interpretation* of these texts by the community through history. (Paul argues by his example in 1 Corinthians that the church's theologising needs to be biblical; the interpretation of the scriptures corrects wrong theologising.)
4) Tradition appreciates the roles of the reader and teachers in interpretation. (Individuals do not rise to positions of control over theological discourse but seek unity among each other that is Christ-centred and biblical.)
5) Tradition enquiry has a different understanding of reasoning. It uses dialectic, arguing *towards* first principles (rather than *from* them). (Paul avoids abstractions that can be manipulated to mean various things. Instead he practices theology concretely through the interpretation of the scriptures and with a focus on Christ Jesus.)

In 1 Corinthians, Paul models a non-ideological theologising relevant to the postmodern context.

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The Missional Doxology of the Philippian Hymn

Jim Purves

Abstract

In this essay we will seek to engage the question, '*How, if at all, can we be sure that our convictions are of God and not purely human constructions for maintaining positions of power in our world?*' by exploring the Phillipian Hymn from a crossdisciplinary perspective, set within the context of Philippians 2.1-18. We will argue that the Philippian Hymn is embedded in an understanding of the Christian life as essentially missional, where mission itself is an expression of the disciples' participation in the life of God. As such, we will contend that the Philippian hymn is best understood as a missional doxology, celebrating both the nature of God and the participation of Christian life in the life of God. In drawing on recent developments in New Testament Studies with some insights from Trinitiarian and missional perspectives on the *Missio Dei*, we will comment on the text itself and go on to explore some ways in which a missional doxology might be applied in the light of our study.

Key words: Mission; Paul; Kenosis; Trinity

I.a   Recent developments in Biblical Studies

Within New Testament Studies, recent research into Second Temple Judaism has yielded important insights into the contextual background of early Christian writings. Richard Bauckham argues that Jesus Christ, within the context of the strong Jewish monotheism of the first century CE, is to be identified not simply as a messianic figure, but as a bearer of the divine identity: in Jesus Christ of Nazareth the revelation of the divine identity of the God of Israel is both present and fully explicated.[1] Moreover, Bauckham insists that a failure to recognise the priority of this Christological profile, so often superceded in modern theology by the worldview of Nicea and the 4th century CE debates, has actually debased our appreciation of a high, New Testament Christology:

> The earliest Christology was already the highest Christology. I call it a Christology of divine identity, proposing this as a way beyond the standard distinction between 'functional' and 'ontic' Christology, a distinction which does not correspond to early Jewish thinking about God and has, therefore, seriously distorted our understanding of New Testament Christology.[2]

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[1] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). The pertinent chapter, Chapter 1, was first published in 1998 as *God Crucified*.
[2] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel,* p.10.

A complementary strain of studies has been rooted in a creative discussion on the nature of justification. This has recently focussed in a debate between two eminent churchmen, John Piper[3] and Tom Wright,[4] and a recognition that the nature of the Atonement embraces understandings of righteousness in the New Testament that are complex, giving rise not only to an understanding of imputed righteousness for the believer but also participational righteousness as an expression of our faith and life in Christ.[5] The rediscovery in Pauline scholarship, that Paul offers more than a forensic understanding of atonement, presents a richer and deeper perception of the Christian life that resonates with the orthopraxis called for in the Gospels. This is further evidenced in Michael Gorman's seminal study of Pauline perspectives on conformity to Christ, *Cruciformity*.[6] Gorman has since further developed his understanding of the Apostle presenting the Christian life as cruciform conformity to Christ: "it is conformity to Christ, or holiness, understood as participation in the very life of God – inhabiting the cruciform God."[7]

We will observe how both these areas of discussion, the divine identity revealed in Christ and the way in which God saves us through Christ, bring fresh insight to our reading of the text.

I.b   Recent developments in Trinitarian Studies and the *Missio Dei*

There has been something of a renaissance in Trinitarian theology in recent years, partly due to the growing influence of Eastern Orthodox perceptions of the Trinity among both Pentecostal thinkers[8] and others concerned to explore and bring fresh emphasis to social and personal identity.[9] Western interpretations of an immanent Trinity have been further developed by employing a perichoretic metaphor, originating in the early fourth century in the Eastern Trinitarian thinking of the Cappadocians, in seeking to find a paradigm for social and interpersonal action among human agents. Where this more Eastern perspective has been combined with the Western theologian Augustine's employment of analogy in speaking of the Trinity,

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[3] John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T.Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007).

[4] Tom Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009).

[5] Michael Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God* (Miton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007). The discussion has been present over the centuries, but the last 30 years has been fuelled by developments in New Testament studies and debate over the nature of Paul's soteriological perspective.

[6] Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality Of The Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

[7] Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 2.

[8] As in Edmund Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

[9] As in Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church As The Image Of The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and in Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God* (London: DLT, 2000).

analogical comparisons and models have arisen. These models are based on a perception of how the Persons of the Trinity interact, translating this into how human social and personal identities can be affirmed. This approach stands in some tension with alternative approaches, which have stressed the actualisation of the Triune economy and the becomingness of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.[10]

The distinction and the question of balance between immanent and economic models of the Trinity impinges upon a missional question. In that we speak of humankind as bearing an image of God, the *Imago Dei*, is this to be rooted first and foremost in a Trinitarian understanding, whereby we describe humankind as *Imago Trinitatis*, or Christologically, where we are fashioned *Imago Christi*? Moreover, in so far as it is legitimate to speak of God's mission (*Missio Dei*), to what measure can the Philippian Hymn support the thesis that it is legitimate to speak of our engagement in the *Missio Dei*? These questions will be in our reading of the text, and will be returned to in the final section of the essay.

II.a   Issues affecting the interpretational tradition of the text

Before coming to the text, we should recognise major interpretational themes and assumptions that have dominated scholarly commentary on the passage in recent years. The prevalent theory since the early twentieth century[11] has been that the passage contains an embedded psalm, the Philippian Hymn,[12] and that this Hymn, Pauline or pre-Pauline, expresses core convictions that Paul owned concerning Christ. Moreover, the Hymn has sufficient challenges in both its Greek vocabulary and the way the text is structured to have generated a rich and varied interpretative tradition, which has been forged in twentieth century discussion by two questions. Firstly, 'what does the hymn celebrate?' That is, is it primarily ethical, Christological or soteriological in its focus and intent? [13] Secondly, given that debate has been characterised by much discussion on the Christology

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[10] As instanced in the ontological dynamic stressed by Karl Barth and followed by interpreters such as Eberhard Jüngel and Thomas Torrance, or in the more recent doxological focus of Catherine LaCugna in *God For us*: *The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: HarperOne, 1993).

[11] Specifically, Ernst Lohmeyer's study, *Kyrios Jesus*, published in 1928.

[12] Hereafter we will refer to the passage, Philippians 2.6-11, as 'the Hymn'.

[13] The appeal of the Hymn as an ethical paradigm is self-evident. In his recent commentary, Charles Cousar follows the departure from the Christological focus spearheaded by Ernst Käsemann in 1950, in emphasising a soteriological focus on the triumphant, victorious Christ: Charles Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

of the Hymn,[14] a further question arises: 'what are the Christological concerns and typologies present in the hymn?'

Due to this second, Christological question, much scholarly debate has been founded on the key concept of *kenosis* found in verse 7,[15] together with associated questions of ontology[16] arising from the previous verse 6. All of this has been set against a wider theological backdrop that has brought into question both the meaning and the relevance of ontological definitions and categories arising from Trinitarian statements in the Nicene Creeds of the fourth century and the Christology of the Chalcedonian Creed of the fifth century. Until recently, what appeared to be missing in most Pauline studies was an engagement with the Gospel as the Gospel of the kingdom of God, as expressed in the narrative and Jesus' teaching within the four Gospel accounts. Also missing was any reflection on whether the Hymn invited engagement with the four Gospel accounts. While the Hymn most certainly invokes ethical, Christological and soteriological reflection, could it be that the Hymn is better understood when set in the context of Paul's awareness and concern for the advance and full advent of the kingdom of God: a central focus for both Jesus and the Gospel narratives?

At a popular level, dispensational teachings and their influence[17] together with an idealisation of Jesus' teaching as represented in the quest for the Historical Jesus had driven a wedge between Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God and a focus on the soteriological aspects of Paul's teaching, especially on their forensic and penal aspects. More recent and well applied New Testament scholarship has sought to overcome this gulf. Such mediating scholarship is well represented by Bird, who views the Hymn as 'fundamentally an ethical exhortation towards humility and self-giving rather than comprising an exercise in Christological speculation';[18] whilst Gorman views Paul as inviting us, together with all disciples of Jesus Christ, into an identification with Christ that is shaped by an embrace of his cruciform identity, detecting in Paul's rendering of the Hymn, a

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[14] The agenda for dogmatic questions being shaped through to the late-20th Century by German theology. Robert Morgan observes that Ernst Käsemann's work shared Barth's repudiation of German Idealism, as witnessed in Barth's rejection of the hymn as an ethical appeal toward Christian imitation of Christ: Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (editors), *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.55.

[15] The English rendering of the noun associated with the verb in the phrase, `avlla. e`auto.n evke,nwsen`. This is obscured in the NIV's rendering, 'he made himself nothing', but much clearer in the NRS.

[16] Issues related to the nature of God's 'Being'.

[17] As expressed and reflected in the effect of the Scofield Bible and derivative dispensational schemes.

[18] Bird, *Introducing Paul*, p.127.

'counterintuitive kenotic and cruciform identity of God displayed in Christ'.[19]

Gorman's stress that the Christian disciple is called into cruciform conformity to Christ leads us into another convictional question that affects what commentators bring to discussion of the text. To what measure can Christians conform in their humanity to the humanity of Jesus Christ? A conviction that sinful flesh can never share in the same humanity as the flesh of Christ is common within the Western tradition.[20] Such a prior conviction will not readily allow an identification of what Christ has done with what the sinner might do unless there are alternative convictional templates that can be brought to bear.

One such template might be offered in Bauckham's work. For Bauckham, the Hymn highlights the contrast between 'high and low status, exaltation and humiliation, honour and shame'.[21] This contrast, present in Christ's manifestation of the divine identity, brings us to a deeper and fuller appreciation of the nature of God Himself. Citing the Mosaic theophany of Exodus 33-34 and the way that John's Prologue relates the revelation of the Word in the Incarnation to the identity of the God of Israel, Bauckham explains:

> God's gracious love, central to the identity of the God of Israel, now takes the radically new form of a *human life* in which the divine self-giving happens. This could not have been expected, but nor is it uncharacteristic. It is novel but appropriate to the identity of the God of Israel.[22]

Here, a complementary perspective can be offered in re-evaluating whether there is any Trinitarian theology implicit within the Hymn. Just as Bauckham contends that this early, New Testament Christology is already the highest theology,[23] it can be reasoned that there is already a dynamic, Trinitarian formulation present in the Hymn. We would argue that this is in fact the case. Further, we would contend that such representation of the economic actualisation of the One God's presence is profoundly more Trinitarian than later, Nicene attempts to differentiate and affirm in ontological terminology. Gorman's explication, that God is revealed in the

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[19] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, pp.25-26.
[20] As in 19th Century Scottish, Reformed environment: *see* Jim Purves, *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), p.143. It is significant that Gorman relates his interpretation of Paul to the more positive, Irenaean anthropology of Eastern Orthodoxy, and the concept of *theosis* found therein: Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, pp.171-173.
[21] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.54.
[22] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.55.
[23] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.10.

three, interconnected realities of 'the narrative identity of Christ the Son, the essential character of God the Father, and the primary activity of the Spirit',[24] offers an exciting way of interpreting Trinitarian presence in terms compatible with Bauckham's stress on divine identity found in Christ. We will return to this later, when we argue for an understanding of the Hymn as a missional doxology.

II.b The Text[25]
Verses 1 - 5

While the Hymn proper is identified as the pericope of verses 6-11, we will deal with it as an embedded component in the context of the surrounding verses. The exhortative character of Paul's address to these Christians is expressed in the preceding verses 1-5. The appeal of verse 1, `ei; tij ou=n`,[26] invoking `Cristo,j`, `avga,ph`, `koinwni,a` and `pneu/ma`,[27] has a content that, whilst presented in poetic prose, points to aspects of communion with the God of Israel. The strong monotheism of Second Temple Judaism and the context in which Paul writes does not lead him to express himself in explicitly Trintiarian terms;[28] but referral and appeal to `avga,ph`, `koinwni,a` and `pneu/ma` are all appropriate to Israel's God and to the `Cristo,j` as bearer of the divine identity. Likewise, where Paul appeals to his correspondents concerning his own sensitivity and desire that he might have `cara`,[29] the appeal is to a unitary identity. This might be realised through his correspondents owning a common resolution[30] to share in love, with a unity of soul and common purpose.[31] We would interpret this to be a call to participation in the qualities of God's unitary character over against being rooted in the arrogant and empty ethics of pagan life (verses 3-4). Certainly, in the bridging verse 5, it is the participatory nature that appears emphasised, `evn u`mi/n o] kai. evn`[32] serving to stress identification with - not merely imitation of - Christ. The use again of the verb `fronei/n`[33] in verse 5, following on its use

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[24] Gorman, Inhabiting the Cruciform God, p.106.

[25] In dealing with the text, we will not rehearse or repeat the observations of specialist New Testament scholars, other than when they impinge upon our argumentation as it shapes our thesis. In addressing the Greek text, I footnote my English translation; or, if I render a word from the text in English translation, the Greek will be footnoted.

[26] *'Therefore if there's any ...'*

[27] *Christ, love, Fellowship* and *Spirit*.

[28] Which became the Orthodox complaint against post-Nicene, Western, Latin theology.

[29] *joy*

[30] `to. auvto. fronh/te`

[31] `avga,ph, su,myucoi` and `fronou/ntej`

[32] *'in you which is also in'*

[33] `tou/to fronei/te`, *'focussing on this'*.

twice in verse 2, suggests that intentionality is here important to the Apostle.

In this opening section, we would discern the genesis of our thesis. Certainly, we note with Bird that the Hymn is not to be viewed simply as a Christological discussion; but we would also moot that it is more than an ethical exhortation. In the language of verses 1-5, we detect a measure of celebration of the very character of God manifest in Christ Jesus, expressed through God's missional intentionality invested in and among these Christian disciples. If Paul believes it is in Jesus that the unique character of Israel's God is revealed, and faith involves being rooted in Christ's identity and aspirations and not simply in decisional and existential reasoning, then verses 1-5 provide a fitting prologue to the Hymn through Paul drawing his correspondents towards an intentionality which they share with the bearer of the divine identity, Jesus of Nazareth.

Verses 6 - 8

The divine identity made manifest in Jesus Christ is revealed both in the self-abasement of verses 6-8 and the exaltation which follows in verses 9-11. Each is complementary to the other in assisting our apprehension of the mission of God, embracing and rescuing humanity through Jesus Christ.[34] That these actions are here presented typologically is not in dispute: among New Testament scholars the presence of both Adamic and Messianic typologies is much debated. However, where these typological allusions inspire ethical propriety and even imitation, do they invite more than that? Is the imitation or participation so engendered to be viewed as an invitation towards imitation of Christ's human behaviour, or might it be even an invitation to participation in the very life of God? As we have noted, Bauckham's emphasis on questions of identity, rather than ontology or function, leads us to a Christology that views the manifestation of the divine identity in this man, Jesus Christ. Where does this in turn take us? Is this a call to ethical imitation or more than that, an invitation both to celebrate and to participate in the dynamic life of God? We will now seek to engage with the text of the Hymn as it relates to these issues in this section, going on to appraise them more fully in the third section of the essay.

The first aspect of verses 6-8 we would note is the intentionality expressed through the two active aorist verbs, `evke,nwsen`[35] in verse 7 and `evtapei,nwsen`[36] in verse 8. Further, where these verbs indicate

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[34] Bauckham affirms that 'the central themes of the passage are the relation between high and low status, and between service and lordship': Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.44.

[35] '*he emptied*'

[36] '*he humbled*'

the active intentionality of Jesus, their object, in both cases e`auto.n,[37] serves to stress the voluntary, intentional aspect of Christ's action and expression as bearer of the divine identity. It is the deliberate and volitional intent of Jesus Christ both to '*empty himself*' and '*humble himself*'.

Central to our understanding of the text is the meaning and usage of *kenosis*, or 'self emptying', in verse 6. Here it is the verbal form of *kenosis* that relates the identity of Jesus Christ '*in the form of God*'[38] to '*(in the) form of a slave*'.[39] Here, it is the whole of God's identity being expressed and entering into the identity of a servant that is associated with Jesus Christ. Following Bauckham's plea that we focus on identity, rather than ontology or function, we will avoid discussion as to whether this is the 'divine' or 'human' aspect of Christ under discussion. We will not interpolate into the text a fifth century Chalcedonian definition or even mindset connoting 'two natures' in Christ, whether human and divine. Likewise, we should note that Paul does not reduce the divine identity into personal Trinitarian terms, whereby particular association with any particular hypostasis of the God's triunity is emphasised. Here, the reference is simply to Jesus Christ, the full bearer of divine identity and possessor of divine status;[40] to the whole of Him entering into the whole of a servant identity.

Bauckham's exegetical point is that the Hymn is an interpretation and application of Deutero-Isaiah Messianic typology, but this predicates a critical theological conclusion: that what is being spoken of here is not simply the unique identity of Jesus Christ, but the unique identity of the God of Israel:

> The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking His own advantage but in self-giving. His self-giving in abasement and service ensures that his sovereignty over all things is also a form of his self-giving. Only the servant can also be the Lord.[41]

A further, complementary understanding of Jesus Christ serving as both the paradigm and the catalyst for human participation with the very life of God Himself is developed by Michael Gorman. For Gorman, *kenosis* also is a manifestation of God, not only of Christ. God is possessed of an essentially kenotic and cruciform character:

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[37] '*himself*'
[38] evn morfh/| qeou/
[39] morfh.n dou,lou
[40] to. ei=nai i;sa qew/|: '*being equal to God*'
[41] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.45.

It is especially imperative that we see the *modus operandi* of both incarnation and cross as theophanic. The narrative identity of Christ reveals a similar disposition in his preexistent and his incarnate life: self-emptying and self-humbling. This is theologically important because it demonstrates that for Paul true humanity and true divinity are analogous at the most fundamental level.[42]

The full manifestation of the divine identity is in this Jesus Christ. A repeated emphasis that this is manifest in the very humanity of Jesus Christ is stressed in the text. He comes '*in the likeness of mankind*'[43] (verse 6) and again, in verse 7, He '*appears*'[44] to us '*as a human being*'.[45] Here is the highest Christology, the full revelation of God present with us in the very manifest presence of Jesus Christ's humanity.

We note that this presents us with a huge challenge and warning against any propensity toward discussing humankind as *imago Trinitatis* where that discussion may be detached from this radically Christological starting point and focus. There can be no real Christian theology without the recognition of the unique and complete theophany that is the humanity of Christ. Likewise, any attempt to speak of the identity of Christ, other than that identity of Christ being the manifestation of the identity of the God of Israel, is a declination and a reduction of the high Christology here present.

The declaration and celebration of the theophany that is in Christ Jesus does not, however, conclude with the action of *kenosis*. Theophany in humanity now affirmed, we are led on to see that this theophany is actualised, in verse 8, in terms of a voluntary, self '*humbling*'[46] that is expressed in '*obedience*'.[47] If the conception of a missional perspective lies in the preceding verses 1-5, then here in the Hymn proper is birthed the expression of the full, missional dynamic. The '*becoming*'[48] of this bearer of the divine identity is inextricably woven into the actualisation of divine intentionality through Jesus Christ's obedience. Furthermore this intentionality is expressed in and through the actualisation of service in obedience.

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[42] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p. 35.
[43] evn o`moiw,mati avnqrw,pwn geno,menoj
[44] eu`reqei.j
[45] w`j a;nqrwpoj
[46] evtapei,nwsen
[47] u`ph,kooj
[48] geno,menoj

Taking up the great messianic theme of Isaiah, our human engagement in this missional actualisation lies in the identity of Christ as the anointed servant of the God of Israel. As Christ is called as a servant, so too are we summoned to the attitude and practice – the intentionality – of servanthood. It is through this servant, Jesus Christ, that the God of Israel extends His salvation to the ends of the earth;[49] and it is in the execution of this servant's task that salvation is effected for sinners.[50] In this Paul is at one with the Gospel writers, directing us to the Messianic paradigm, that we should adopt the very intentionality of Jesus Christ.[51] Here Paul emphasises the participational paradigm in Jesus Christ.[52] It is here, of course, that Paul roots his own identity as an apostle, because he is first and foremost as `Cristou/ dou/loj`, *'slave of Christ'*.[53]

An integral aspect of Jesus Christ as manifester of the divine identity lies in His attitude and practice of active obedience to the will of God. An appreciation of this emphasis on Jesus Christ's willing submission is essential to understanding what we are called to in the will of God. The very essence of discipleship is discipline and conformity to the instruction – *Torah* – of God to humankind. What is prominent here is the emphasis that God is to be discovered not simply in and through the appearance of Christ as a man, but as a man who is the faithful servant of the God of Israel. The ultimate revelation of God in and through the Incarnation as a manifestation of the divine identity is not to be sidelined but is made complete and is perfected through the servant-ministry of Jesus Christ. There is no greater or more impressive manifestation to be had.

Verses 9 – 11

If the abasement and humbling of Christ is the birth, the celebration and rejoicing that carries our narrative through to its doxological celebration lies in these concluding verses of the hymn. It is here quite understandable that commentators who affirm the soteriological over Christological

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[49] Isaiah 49.1-7

[50] Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12

[51] v 5 `tou/to fronei/te`

[52] The emphasis on soteriological engagement, rather than status, is of course not simply Pauline. The seven 'I am' sayings of John's Gospel draw the reader into seeing the paradigmatic nature of Christ's humanity, drawing us into participational involvement in His messianic path. Only a later, post Nicene obsession with ontology would cause these passages to be read as affirmations of ontological status rather than essentially as affirmations of divine identity. For the soteriological significenance of the 'I am' sayings in both John and the LXX, see Richard Bauckham's essay, "Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John" in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 239-252.

[53] Philippians 1.1; Galatians 1.10

typologies in the hymn found their argument, looking to the eschatological expectation and *telos* anticipated.[54]

Yet this second half of the Hymn can also serve to expose a deliberate paradox within the preceding verses. Gorman argues that here we are faced with Paul's appeal to the counter-intuitive revelation of God with which we are confronted and which we are invited to embrace in Jesus Christ - counter-intuitive because it is contrary to any concept of deity other than one radically restructured in the light of Jesus Christ. Commenting on the preceding verses, Gorman notes,

> Although Messiah Jesus was in the form of God, a status people assume means the exercise of power, he acted *in* character — in a shockingly ungodlike manner according to normal but misguided human perceptions of divinity, contrary to what we would expect but, in fact, in accord with true divinity — when he emptied and humbled himself.[55]

Gorman's interpretation allows us to see that the exaltation is not simply a vindication of Jesus Christ, but the very manifestation of God as truly God, in terms of His own self-definition. He is God who chooses to demean and debase Himself in order to effect our salvation.

It is this observation that allows us to contest that this Hymn, from its conception, through its birth and now in its celebration, is truly a missional doxology. For we would argue that what we have here is not a rehearsal of a bifurcated Christology that rips apart the coherence of the Incarnate Word, but a celebration of the divine identity of the God of Israel, inherently different and utterly unlike the gods of the Graeco-Roman world which surrounded the first Christians. Here is a God whose manner of self-revelation does indeed demand a counter-intuitive way of understanding. It is counter-intuitive in the way we think of God, a God who comes close rather than remaining far off; but it is also counter-intuitive in the way the Hymn here invites us to see that we are to participate in the missional intentionality of God as the Christ Himself does.

If what is rehearsed here is indeed theophanic, what are its implications? Bauckham is cautious, leaning towards a celebration of what the Messiah has undertaken in terms of Deutero-Isaiah fulfilment, whereby through 'the career of the servant of the Lord, his suffering, hu-

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[54]For Cousar, 'the hymn first announces the defeat of the forces that enslave humans and then declares the lordship of Christ', Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon*, p.59

[55] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p. 27.

miliation, death, and exaltation, is the way in which the sovereignty of the one true God comes to be acknowledged by all.'[56] Bauckham's focus is upon what is undertaken by God in Christ, not upon our response. Gorman, on the other hand, is clear that this means for us a 'participation, by means of Spirit-enabled theoformity, in the reality of the life of the kenotic triune God'.[57] The tenability of this thesis lies in the manner in which he links the Hymn with the immediately following section of the Epistle, in verses 12-18.

Verses 12 – 18

Bird represents a majority view among commentators in opining that the *indicative* of what has been accomplished in Christ, found in the Hymn, leads to an *imperative* for the Christian's ethical response in the following verses.[58] Gorman, however, links the celebration of Incarnation and full participation to connect the verses that follow the Hymn not only as an ethical imperative arising out of the indicative of what Christ has done for us, but a necessary predicate, the 'community that bears witness to this divine mission ... A people characterized by communal kenosis for the good of the world is both the means and the goal of God's saving activity here and now.'[59]

This stress on intentionality in missional participation, rather than merely imitation of ethical intent, makes sense of the injunction in verse 12, closely partnered to the affirmation of God's sovereign enabling in the midst of our activity, in verse 13. Furthermore, the allusion to 'shining like stars' in verse 15 unmistakeably evokes the eschatological, celebratory anticipation of the same metaphor uses in the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel.[60] Here in the Hymn is a destiny in eschatological fulfilment that in some manner touches us already, as the disciples already shine[61] in anticipation, already participating in the life and mission of God because of their present participation in the life of Jesus Christ.

In pursuing our thesis that the Hymn presents us with a missional doxology, we are attracted by both Gorman's exposition and the strength of emphasis on participation and what that leads him to. However, we have some reservation arising from how far we can express present,

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[56] Martin and Dodd (editors), *Where Christology Began*, p. 136.

[57] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p. 38.

[58] Bird, *Introducing Paul*, p.136.

[59] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p. 38.

[60] Daniel 12.3

[61] `fai,nesqe` denotes a present action of shining, not only a future hope.

human participation in the divine, without slipping into a confusion of the two. If we were to take the Hymn merely as an ethical injunction, this would not prove a problem to us. But where we have detected a call to missional participation, to what extent can we distinguish present participation in the missional activity of God from complete, full and unqualified deification of our humanity? To answer this challenge, we will turn in our third section to address this question together with others raised in the first section of this essay.

III.   Missional Doxology

We have raised three questions which we now turn to address in this final section of our essay. Firstly, in the first section, we questioned whether speech about humankind as the image of God (*Imago Dei*) is to be expressed in Trinitarian terms, as *Imago Trinitatis*; or Christologically, whereby we speak of humankind being formed in the Image of Christ (*Imago Christi*)? Secondly, in so far as it is legitimate to speak of God's mission (*Missio Dei*), to what measure does our reading of the Hymn support the thesis that it is legitimate to speak of our being taken up in engagement in the *Missio Dei*? Thirdly, in the second section, we concluded with a final question, asking whether we should or could distinguish present participation in the missional activity of God from complete, full and unqualified deification of our humanity? We now turn to reflect briefly on each of these in turn.

Should speech about humankind as *Imago Dei* be founded in *Imago Trinitatis* or *Imago Christi*?

Some may answer, 'let us have both'! Our question, however, is about subject and predicate. Put another way, if we are to follow the leading of the Biblical canon, should our starting point be with Jesus Christ or with a doctrine of Trinity? Our response, in the light of scholarship we have reviewed in relation to our text, is that it must be founded unequivocally upon *Imago Christi*. Nowhere in the Early Fathers does an explication of humankind as *Imago Trinitatis* find expression. This is not to belittle the mystery of God unveiled in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, as the present writer among others has argued and demonstrated elsewhere, the understanding of God as a communion of Persons, removed from and construed outwith a contingency upon the theophanic event that is Jesus Christ, is a perception that arises in the fourth century at the very earliest.[62]

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[62] Jim Purves, *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement*, pp. 31-77.

Moreover, in response to the question, '*How, if at all, can we be sure that our convictions are of God and not purely human constructions for maintaining positions of power in our world?*', we would observe that the post-Nicene development of a comprehensive doctrine of an immanent Trinity, described and distinguished as ontologically separated[63] communion removed from humankind, parallels the emergence of Christendom as an expression of political power, going on to develop separated doctrines of the immanent Trinity in politically separated dominions of Latin Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. We would also observe that recent re-emergence of interest and emphasis in stressing an awareness of God as economic Trinity occurs in a time where the power of Christendom has been weakened and arguably broken. Is this a cause of concern or celebration? I recall an early class in theology, asking a group of young Christians for adjectives to describe God. Their response was to give me the 'omni's': omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent - words associated with power and might: human constructions for maintaining positions of power in our world?

On the other hand, we have met in our study of the text with Gorman's appeal to think counter-intuitively. To grasp how Christ, as presented by the Apostle in the Hymn, calls us to view God in a manner that is radically different from the place of power exercised by Caesar, as an earlier call to discipleship invited the Hebrews to see that the God who leads them out of Egypt is fundamentally different in His expression and understanding of power from the Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. Such a God calls us to a counter-intuitive manner of thinking that is not necessarily more attractive to us than convictional constructions that serve to keep others and even ourselves in a place of bondage, oppression, exploitation and control.[64] Gorman's emphasis on radically orientating our understanding of the Christian life and faith itself around a focus on participation in the very humanity of Jesus Christ has offered us a tenable interpretation of the Hymn that invites us not only to ethical imitation but substantial communion with the God who calls us into His own cruciform identity. Such an interpretation surely invites caution in any move to fashion our understanding of God upon any typological or analogical vision other than that focussed on the cruciform centre that is in Jesus Christ.

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[63] As '*spirit*' is separated from '*flesh*' within a Platonic cosmology.

[64] As argued from an Old Testament perspective by Walter Brueggemann, *Journey To The Common Good* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2010), pp. 44*ff.*.

Is it legitimate to speak of our being taken up in engagement in the *Missio Dei*?

John Flett, in his recent study on the relationship of Christian mission to understandings of Trinitarian theology,[65] points to a perceived deficiency in some recent Trinitarian thought, especially in appropriating the Social Trinity and the Cappadocian perspective of *perichoresis*, in that an idealised reflection on God's essential nature can lead us to a view of communion with God that relegates mission to second place, separating the act of God's reaching out through Christ from God's essential, immanent identity. Mission becomes, by implication, an afterthought.[66] What we are faced with in the Hymn, however, is an emphasis upon *kenosis*, or Christ's self-emptying, that draws us into reflecting on what is truly defining of the divine identity. Could it be that Christian mission must involve at its very heart self-emptying and renunciation, because this is what God in Christ undertakes and what God in Christ calls us into? As Flett observes, 'The question of the missionary act is answered in God's self-humiliation and his exaltation of the human'.[67]

In seeking to engage with our second question, we must first then ask whether our Christological and anthropological convictions can accommodate an understanding of mission as participation in the very life, objectives and expression of ministry that is in Jesus Christ. As noted, our ability to do this may be impeded by any competing focus on a perception of God that looks firstly to an immanent rather than economic Trinity; but it also will be affected if we are convinced, for instance, that it is impossible for a sinless Christ to share in the same humanity as our sinful humanity. In such an instance, we will inevitably encounter difficulty in accommodating a participationalist understanding of communion with God, the Christ and Christian mission itself.[68]

Our response, arising from our reading of the Hymn, is that Christian mission can be nothing other than participation in the mission of Christ himself. It is such adherence to Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit and lived out in submission and obedience to the God of Israel, that releases us into a realisation of the Triune reality of the divine identity that can only be found through being taken up in missional activity in Jesus' name. As

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[65] John G. Flett, *The Witness of God*: *The Trinity,* Missio Dei*, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Cambridge:Eerdmans, 2010).
[66] Flett, *The Witness of God*, p.206.
[67] Flett, *The Witness of God*, p.212.
[68] These issue are comprehensively discussed , from a New Testament perspective, in Tom Wright, *Justification: God's Plan And Paul's Vision*, (London: SPCK, 2009).

Bauckham notes, in commenting on the narrative of Jesus Christ's worship by the disciples at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel,

> The scene is a Gospel equivalent to the last part of the christological passage in Philippians 2:6-11. But, whereas in that passage it is the Old Testament divine name, YHWH, that the exalted Christ receives, here the disciples are to baptise "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"(v.19). The formula, as in the phrase "calling on the name of the Lord" which New Testament usage takes up from the Old with reference to baptism and profession of Christian faith, requires precisely a divine name. "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" names the newly disclosed identity of God, revealed in the story of Jesus the Gospel has told.[69]

The Hymn is of necessity missiological both in content and focus, because the very character of the Triune God is at its heart. *Missio Dei* meets us and carries us in our humanity into the new creation that we have become in Christ Jesus. It is the engagement of the Creator with that He has created, coming out of the heart of God's engagement with us. This finds its focus nowhere other than in participation in Christ, embracing us in the powerful practices of his ministry, lifting us up towards eschatological communion in the Triune name.

Can we distinguish present participation in the missional activity of God from complete, full and unqualified deification of our humanity?

The key to answering our final question lies in our concluding response to the second question posed above. If present participation can be inspired in the powerful practices patterned by Jesus Christ and celebrated in verses 6-8 of the hymn, then it also ends there. For in verses 9-11 we are met with inspiration and affirmation of eschatological hope and fulfilment expressed in the exaltation of the One who has fully revealed the divine identity, gathering our humanity to Himself, lifted up to manifest the glory of the God of Israel. In these verses, there is no ethic to emulate or sacrifice to participate in. There is but the wonder of being spectators who taste, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, something of what we intentionally focus on yet wait for in the future coming of God's Kingdom in its fullest.

The Hymn stands as an invitation to us to participate in the life of Christ, leading us to the place of our baptism into union with Christ in His death.

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[69] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p.57.

It is a call to present participation thus far. But beyond that? Beyond that we are left in our place of weakness, service and powerlessness to celebrate the victory and vindication of the one whom we adore in doxological joy, awaiting the fullness of His coming. For the present we patiently pursue participation in his path. And then, who knows but God what beauty awaits us or the measure in which our humanity will be transformed?

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What To Do When Your Best Ideas Are Too Good

Tim Noble

Abstract
This article looks at what happens when good theological ideas become so powerful that they run the risk of becoming ideological, and thus prevent the encounter with God. Focusing on the philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion, it seeks to construct first a language to address the problem, and then illustrates what has been said with a discussion of liberation theology. The article uses liberation theology's appeal to the centrality of the poor as a test case, and discusses whether liberation theology methodology as detailed by Clodovis Boff can cope with the threat of ideology.

Key words: Ideology; Convictions; Levinas; Marion; Clodovis Boff; Liberation Theology

Introduction

In this article I want to consider what happens when our best ideas seem – indeed perhaps are – so self-evidently good and in keeping with the Scriptures that we cannot move beyond them. Another way of phrasing the question is to ask whether the good is good enough, or whether our journey is not always without end, since the mystery of God into which we journey is inexhaustible.[1] In suggesting this latter possibility, I will also argue that our best ideas, which we can term our convictions, always run the danger of becoming ends in themselves, rather than guidelines on this infinite journey.

There are various ways of looking at convictions, some of which are addressed in other papers in this volume. In what follows, I will understand convictions in terms of what has traditionally been called *fides quae creditur*, the content of faith, as distinct from *fides qua creditur*, the gift / act of faith. I do this because our convictions are our most cherished beliefs, and these beliefs, in as far as they are articulated, however incoherently, become the content of our faith. Even if Luther himself never uttered the phrase so frequently attributed to him – "Here I stand and I can do no other" – it can serve as a helpful summary of what convictions are about. The content of our faith is, for the most part, non-negotiable.

However, because the content of our faith is something that we articulate, its articulation is subject to the limitations of human existence and human reason. Thus it is that when we become so firmly identified

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[1] This is the language and imagery of, among others, Gregory of Nyssa. See on this Ivana Noble, "The Apophatic Way in Gregory of Nyssa" in Petr Pokorný, Jan Roskovec (eds.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp.323-339

with the statement of our faith, we run the risk of making idols of our statements. In order to make this rather more concrete, I will introduce a three-way conversation between two philosophers and a liberation theologian. The two philosophers are Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas, the theologian is Clodovis Boff.

Marion will give a language to talk about the problem of idolatry and iconicity, especially in terms of concepts. Why is it that some of our ideas, especially our best ones, seem to end up dominating us to such an extent that we are in thrall to them, and what do we need to break free from this? Levinas, in warning us of the danger of reducing all to the same, which is arguably another way of talking of idolatry, helps us to see that we need some other to prevent our ideas and convictions becoming totalitarian. With the help of the methodology developed for liberation theology by Clodovis Boff, we can see both the danger of this happening and some tentative steps to avoid it, which can be strengthened with help from Marion and Levinas. I do this in particular reference to liberation theology's treatment of the poor.

JEAN-LUC MARION

Jean-Luc Marion was born in Paris in 1946 and educated at the University of Nanterre, then the Sorbonne and the École Normale Supérieure. After graduation, he taught at Poitiers, Nanterre and now the Sorbonne. He also teaches in the University of Chicago. His professional philosophical life has been devoted to both Cartesian studies and to questions concerning phenomenology. Marion is also a convinced Catholic with a strong interest in theological questions, and has dealt on theological issues in a number of his works. It is in this regard that his writings on iconicity and idolatry first developed.[2] I turn now to these writings.

Icons and Idols in Marion's Writings

> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (*2 Cor 4:4*)

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[2] For a brief biographical sketch of Marion, see Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A* Theo-*logical Introduction,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp.3-12. See also Ruud Welten, "The Paradox of God's Appearance on Jean-Luc Marion", in Peter Jonkers and Ruud Welten (eds.), *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp.186-206, here pp.187-188 and for a fuller development of ideas here, Tim Noble, "Jean-Luc Marion, Idols and Liberation Theology", *Communio Viatorum* XLVIII/2 (2006), pp.131-154.

This quotation from Paul[3] is a helpful way to begin to reflect with Marion on the nature of the idol. He reminds us that "[t]he idol never deserves to be denounced as illusory, since, by definition, it is seen – *eidolon*, that which is seen".[4] In this sense, the idol can be considered as that which wholly consumes our view by offering itself as all that is. In doing so, it reflects us back to ourselves: "Name your idol and you will know who you are".[5] However, in the course of his reflections, this idol moves from essentially being only about me, to being something more. It is not simply that it returns or mirrors my gaze. But it does present us only with the surface. Marion's discussion of this aspect of the idol comes out of a fascinating appreciation of the work of the painter Mark Rothko, who struggled to deal with what is the necessary (and literal) superficiality of painting. All painting has to be two-dimensional, and visible.[6] But the visible always runs the risk of hiding or making inaccessible the invisible. It is the paradox that when we look into the sun, we are blinded. Too much light is damaging.

In terms of the discussion on convictions and ideologies, the following can be said. Our convictions can be excellent, expressive of the best we have, the best we can think. But it is just because of this that they are so tempting. Our convictions in the area of theology or faith are essentially convictions about who God is for us and who we are before God. Thus, they should be paths or pointers to the Transcendent. However, if we are not careful, we make them into gods, so that what we defend is the articulation of the conviction, rather than what lies always and necessarily beyond, the God about whom our convictions are held.

Over against the ultimately reductionist nature of the idol, Marion places the icon. Again, Marion is interested in the icon at a conceptual level. So, it is worth emphasising that, whatever we might say about our convictions, and however rooted we might think they are in something we call "the real world", they are indubitably concepts. There may well be a reality behind them, but we have to remember that our conviction about reality is not itself the limit of reality. So, if the idol is the concept that

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[3] For a more extended consideration of idolatry in the Pauline corpus, especially with regard to Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5, but ranging more widely, see Brian Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor*, (Grand Rapids: Wm.Eerdmans, 2007).

[4] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.9. As Bruce Ellis Benson points out, the word "idea" is related etymologically to the words "ideology" and "idolatry". See Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry*, (Downers' Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), p.23.

[5] Marion, *In Excess*, *Studies of Saturated Phenomena,* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2002), p.61.

[6] *Ibid*, pp.75-81.

becomes an end in itself, an infinitely high wall that imprisons me, what is the icon?

Perhaps primarily for Marion, the icon is that which allows me to glimpse the invisible as invisible. It always points beyond itself. Instead of my gaze creating the idol, the icon gazes on me and in its gazing creates me. "The depth of the visible face of the Son delivers to the gaze the invisibility of the Father as such", writes Marion.[7] Marion does not want to say with this that in Christ we see directly the Father as Father. Rather, it is in the revelation in Jesus of the fullness of the Godhead that we are enabled to "see", or more accurately, be gazed upon, by the invisibility of the Father. The icon allows us to be confronted by the invisible which remains invisible. This is where the difference with the idol is to be encountered. The idol can (only) show us the visible. It may be that this visible is shown to excess, but it remains the visible. The icon, on the other hand, is in this sense what Marion would call a saturated phenomenon.

This idea is perhaps Marion's major contribution to phenomenology.[8] When there is an encounter between me and something else (a physical object or an idea), intentionality and intuition, the meaning I give to the thing and the thing as it presents itself to me, normally more or less coincide. Marion considers what happens when this interrelation does not proceed quite so smoothly, where the problem is not in how I perceive, but in the phenomenon itself. These are cases where "intuition gives (itself) in exceeding what the concept (signification, intentionality, aim, and so on) can foresee of it and show. I call these saturated phenomena, or paradoxes".[9] That is to say, that in some instances the phenomenon contains more than we are capable of seeing, there is an excess of phenomenon over against the possibilities we have of grasping it. Thus, when we regard an icon, it presents us not just with what can be seen, but also with what cannot be seen. There is, literally, more to it than meets the eye, and it calls us always towards this more.[10]

Another key term for interpreting the role of the icon is "distance". In the final chapter of his first major theological book *The Idol and*

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[7] Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies,* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p.8.

[8] See "Le Phénomène Saturé" in Marion, *Le Visible et Le Révélé*, (Paris: CERF, 2005), pp.35-74, and also Horner, *A* Theo-*logical Introduction,* pp109-134, for a consideration of Marion's contributions to the renewal of phenomenology through his account of the horizon of givenness, and the saturated phenomenon. See also Welten, "The Paradox of God's Appearance", p.200.

[9] Marion, *In Excess,* p.112. See also Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A* Theo-*logical Introduction*, pp. 123-124, Benson, *Graven Ideologies,* pp.191-193.

[10] This is expressed artistically in the inverse perspective of the icon, where the narrow point of the horizon is the viewer, who thus looks into a distance which constantly expands.

Distance, Marion asks whether there can be any definition of distance. "First, distance has a definition. Second, it remains indefinable by definition", he writes.[11] This defined indefinability is what ultimately makes distance iconic. Distance cannot both be approached and still remain distance. It must, rather, continue to be distant. This means that distance makes itself present to the extent that it makes itself distant. It is, thus, in its deliberate absence that it is most keenly felt. As Marion puts it elsewhere, "'God' shines, in his very glare, by his absence".[12] Marion sees Christ and the divine filiation in terms of distance, of the Christ who is the icon of the Father, who in making the Father present serves to make clear his absence, his otherness.

The icon can also be understood, for Marion, as the gift which gives itself. To explain what he means by this, he offers a fascinating reading of the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). His starting point for this is the fact that the only time in the New Testament where the word *ousia* is found, it refers to the property which the younger son seeks to possess (vv.12-13). Moreover, the story starts with the son demanding of the father "Give me my share *tes ousias* that is mine". The act of giving precedes and gives rise to the possession of the *ousia.* But because he wants to own what is gift, to make his what is not his, the son loses the gift and the sonship which is his. It is only when he realises that no one will give him anything (cf. v.16), and that only the Father is the giver of gifts that he can be restored to the right relationship with his father. As soon as the gift is seized, it is no longer gift, but as long as we recognise the need for giftedness, then the relationship with the Giver continues.

In terms of convictions, especially convictions about our faith, we are called on to remember that faith is a gift. If our convictions want to possess and order that gift, to make it our own in the strong sense of possessing it over against God, then we have already lost it. My faith is now in myself, and not in God, because the transcendence of God has been reduced to a concept or idea about God. As long, however, as faith remains gift, something which is experienced in all its surprising and untameable

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[11] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, p.198. Distance, as Marion points out, (pp.200-201) is *di-* and *stance*, standing in two places, which cannot be one. As long as distance can be included and allowed to be distance, there can be no "taking a stance", and where no stance is taken no idol can become fixed. See also on this, especially in relation to Marion's later work, Derek Morrow, "The Love 'Without Being' That Opens (To) Distance. Part Two: From the Icon of Distance to the Distance of Icon in Marion's Phenomenology of Love", *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005), pp.493-511

[12] Marion, "Métaphysique et phénoménologie", *Le Visible et le Révélé*, p.95. The inverted commas around God are one way of dealing with the unnameability of God.

power, something that challenges me and calls me forward on the journey to the Giver, it is iconic.

However, because the notions of gift and giver run the risk of allowing Being, which Marion regards as the chief and foundational idol, to enter into the story again, he later focuses more on the concept of "givenness".[13] In *In Excess*, he writes

> Givenness is equivalent in fact to the phenomenon itself, the two sides of which, the appearing (from the side of consciousness) and that which appears (from the side of the thing), are articulated according to the principle of an "admirable correlation" only because the first is taken as a given, given by and according to the second, givenness itself.[14]

For Marion, the most striking example of the icon is the face, for it is this which permits us most fully to experience the givenness of the gift. The gift itself is a saturated phenomenon, one offering more than we can intend, more than we can accept, more than we can understand. There is always an excess, with which we are filled. Marion names (or rather de-nominates) this excess as God, as *agape*, love. It is a de-nomination, a naming that is a not naming, because God cannot be reduced to a name, nor even be named as one who is a "beyond name".[15] The givenness of the gift is always that – to say more about it, by describing it too much or seeking to control by knowing the giver, is to limit it, to make the icon into an idol.

EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Emmanuel Levinas was born in Lithuania in 1905/1906 (the difference depends on which calendar one uses – January 12th 1906 in the Gregorian or December 30th 1905 in the Julian, in use in the Russian Empire which ruled Lithuania when he was born.) He moved to France in 1923, and studied with both Husserl and Heidegger. He was captured, as a French soldier, during the Second World War. As a Jew, it was only the fact that he was a soldier that saved him from death at the hands of the Nazis, a fate that befell nearly all his family. After the war he was director of L' École Normale Israélite Orientale. From 1961 he was a professor at the

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[13] On Marion`s attempt to set up a phenomenological approach to love as givenness, see Derek Morrow, "The Love 'Without Being' That Opens (To) Distance. Part One: Exploring the Givenness of the Erotic Phenomenon with J-L. Marion", *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005), pp.281-298

[14] Marion, *In Excess*, p.21. See also the discussion in Horner, *A Theo-logical Introduction*, pp.110-111 and Benson, *Graven Ideologies*, pp.203-205

[15] In what is probably Marion's most famous theological work, *God Without Being*, he seeks to free God from being enslaved to the concept of Being. In naming God, we assert, he argues, God's existence, but this makes God dependent on Being, and in refusing to reduce God to a name, he seeks to allow God to be the one who transcends all, including Being.

University of Poitiers, then from 1967 in Paris, first in Nanterre, and from 1973 at the Sorbonne. He died on December 25th 1995. His writings combine reflections on the Scriptures and Talmud, as well as his more directly philosophical writings. However, although he wanted to distinguish the two, they are in fact more like two sides of the same coin.

Levinas on Totality

Here I want to look very briefly at Levinas' understanding of totality.[16] One way of looking at ideology[17] is to see it in terms of the reduction of all to the same. Throughout his first major philosophical work *Totalité et Infini*[18] Levinas addresses this question. What happens when all is reduced to the I, when the I becomes the centre of the universe. He puts it as follows:

> The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralising the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same. Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other, to ensure the authenticity of the I… Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.[19]

This is at the heart of Levinas' insistence on the return of ethics as first philosophy, since for him all ontology is about power.

To put this in terms of convictions and ideas about faith, we can stop to consider how often we ask questions or make statements about what it is "to be" a Christian. Mostly the intent is innocent enough, with no desire to make great ontological claims. But Levinas' point is that such claims are being made, and ontology is made first philosophy, since they seek to determine what it is to believe in terms of being. Further, they insist that being a Christian is some version of I, being like me or us, or even being different to the I or to us. Either of those, however, is to put the I at the centre and demand of the other that he or she become like the I, either in terms of similarity or difference. This is totality, and for Levinas it is reductive and ultimately murderous.

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[16] A good introduction to Levinas can be found in Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[17] It is perhaps useful to keep a distinction between ideology and idolatry, whilst recognising that they are closely related. See on this Jürgen Manemann, "Interruptions. Idolatry from the Perspective of 'Political Theology'", in Burggraeve, De Tavernier, Pollefeyt and Hanssens (eds.), *Desirable God? Our Fascination with Idols and New Deities*, (Leuven, Peeters, 2003), pp.95-118. Manemann writes (p.97) "idolatry has to be understood as a form of mimesis which makes itself like the environment, whereas ideologies are more kinds of false projection that make the environment like itself."

[18] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, (trans. Alphonso Lingis), (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, n.d. - original French, 1961).

[19] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 45-46

The Commanding Other

Over against this, he places the other, the one who commands. For Levinas, "[t]o approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression… it is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly to have the idea of infinity."[20] The encounter with the other is what releases me from my imprisonment within being, and more precisely within my own being. In making ethics the first philosophy, Levinas is certainly not positing a particular way of behaving, for that would simply be to refocus the nature of totality – you are good because you do as I do, you are bad because you do not do as I do. He is, instead, placing the whole ontological foundation of Western philosophy in question, because of its insistence on the primacy of the I.[21]

As a Brazilian commentator on his work notes, "Levinas' intention [is] to establish an intimate relationship between ethics and metaphysics, or rather, an intrigue of ethics with metaphysics".[22] To this end, the same commentator quotes Levinas' own definition of ethics from *Autrement que Savoir*: "The term ethics for me always means the fact of encounter, of the relation of an I with an other..."[23] Thus, ethics is discovered in relationship, in, one might say, praxis.[24]

I am, then, always confronted by the face of the other, who comes to me, demanding "Thou shalt not kill".[25] This other in some sense holds me under her or his sway.[26] I am not in any simple sense free to do what I want, but I am free to respond to the demands of the other. Thus, ideology is rendered almost impossible, since I am no longer able to reduce the other to the I, but now dwell in the unboundedness (a better way of understanding *infini* than infinity) of the world of the other. I cannot set

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[20] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.51. Emphasis in original.

[21] Cf. Ulpiano Vásquez, "Apresentando Emmanuel Levinas", in Eliana Yunes (ed.), "Emmanuel Levinas e Jean-Paul Sartre: Duas Faces da Alteridade", Revista Multitextos CTCH, II/7 (2008), pp.9-16, here p.13, and Nilo Ribeiro Junior, *Sabedoria da Paz: Ética e teo-lógica em Emmanuel Levinas*, São Paulo: Loyola, 2008, pp.22-65.

[22] Ribeiro Junior, *Sabedoria da Paz,* p.271 and see the discussion on the following pages.

[23] Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement que Savoir*, (Paris: Osiris, 1988), p.28, cited in Ribeiro Junior, *Sabedoria da Paz*, p.271 (I translate here from the Portuguese).

[24] See on this Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, pp.33-44: "To state boldy that ethics is both 'first philosophy' and 'first theology' is to situate the origins of philosophy and theology in praxis. It is to privilege praxis as a point of departure for both philosophy and theology."

[25] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.199.

[26] Cf., Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.178: "To be attentive is to recognise the mastery of the Other, to receive his command, or, more exactly, to receive from him the power to command." See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (trans. Alphonso Lingis), (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p.112: "A subject is a hostage".

limits to my response, to what I do, or think, or am, because to do so would be to allow totality back in through the rear door.

The Third – The Other of my Other

Nevertheless, however inspiring this may sound, Levinas is also aware of the limitations of this approach. For, whilst I may be free of ideology, it could clearly allow the other to seek to reduce me to the I of the other. Thus, he introduces the notion of the "Third".[27] The "Third" is the other of my other, and nothing which the other demands of me can be allowed to do harm to this Third. In this way, Levinas seeks to safeguard what we might call the social dimension of human existence. For him, anyway, the other is always defined primarily in the Old Testament categories of the privileged other, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger.[28] But neither they nor anyone else can command me to harm anyone else.

Levinas, then, offers an understanding of ideology that explains how our convictions can become dangerous, especially because we are sure they are right and good. Because our convictions are in some sense, as McClendon argues, constitutive of who we are, they are clearly prone to being used as tools for power, as part of an ontology of power which seeks to reduce the other to the I.

CLODOVIS BOFF – THE WAY OF THEOLOGICAL METHOD[29]

I now want to look at this question of how to deal with the potential ideological nature of convictions in relation to liberation theology, and in particular its treatment of the poor. I will do this with particular reference to the methodology of the Brazilian theologian, Clodovis Boff.[30] His own interest in his work on theological method[31] is to see how it is possible to

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[27] Emmanuel Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l' idée*, (Paris: Vrin, 1982), p.134, as cited by Ribeiro Junior, *Sabedoria da Paz*, p.91 - "My resistance begins when the evil which [the Other] does to me is done to a third who is also my neighbour".

[28] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.215, cf. p.78, p.251.

[29] For a great deal more on Boff, see my doctoral work, Tim Noble, *Keeping the Window Open: The Theological Method of Clodovis Boff and the Problem of the Alterity of the Poor*, Prague: IBTS, 2009, especially chapter 4, and Tim Noble, *The Poor in Liberation Theology: Icons or Idols?*, (Equinox: London, forthcoming).

[30] Clodovis Boff, the younger brother of Leonardo Boff, comes from a family of Italian descent, and was born in 1944 in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. He entered the Servites in the early 1960s and studied in Brazil and Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium. Since then he has worked and taught in various places in Brazil and Rome, at the same time being heavily engaged in pastoral work, earlier in the north-western state of Acre in the Amazon rainforest region, and then also in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro. Since 2000 he has lived in the Servite formation house in Curitiba, where he also teaches at the Catholic University. He has written numerous books and articles (something over 200 articles, and some 20 books). These cover the area of theological method, faith and politics, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (CEBs – Base Ecclesial Communities), and more recently Social Mariology.

[31] He has written two works on theological method. His doctorate, on which I focus mostly here, is Clodovis Boff, *Teologia e Prática: Teologia do Político e suas mediações*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978 –

relate in a meaningful and just way theology and the political (or more generally, what he calls sciences of the social). Nevertheless, looking at his method will give us some indication of how, with help from thinkers like Marion and Levinas, it may be possible to avoid falling too far into the trap of ideological thinking.

At the heart of liberation theology is a claim about the iconic status of the poor as "a sacrament of Christ" or "a sacrament of salvation".[32] But this is clearly open to ideological abuse, when the poor are used as a tool for power, by the theologian or the Church. Then, theology rather than helping liberate the poor becomes another oppressive agent, burdening them with the additional task of being saviour to the theologian.

Without going too deeply into his method, a few brief comments may help. Boff wants to look at how we can reflect on the social impact of the world around us, and to do this, he says, we need to turn to those academic disciplines which study the world, especially what he calls the sciences of the social / political. In order to clarify the relationship between these and theology he develops the notion of the autonomy and regionality of any academic discipline. Autonomy means that it must be allowed to set its own internal rules of procedure, and no other discipline has the right to try to force it to fit in its own rules. On the other hand, regionality is a reminder of the limitations of any discipline, which never operates in complete isolation from others and must always maintain what we might call a decent humility.[33]

However, at whatever level these various theoretical discourses function, they remain theories of reality. Any attempt to absolutise a theory of reality and claim that it is reality itself is, for Boff, liable to lead to

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English Translation: *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert Barr, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) = ET). I work with the second edition from 1982. He has also written an even longer work, Clodovis Boff, *Teoria do Método Teológico*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998).

[32] In Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff, *Bible, Church and Poor: Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Aspects of the Option for the Poor* (trans. Paul Burns), (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1989), Chapter V is entitled The Poor, Sacrament of God (p.109). See also Marc Girard, *O Pobre: Sacramento de Deus*, (trad. Paulo Ferreira Valério), (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1998), p.155-156, who calls the poor "icons of Christ". See also Juan Fernando López SJ, *Pobres Sacramentos?! Os Sacramentos no Dinamismo do Seguimento de Jesus Presente no Pobre*, (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1995), p.21: "The poor are sacraments of Christ". This is not a unique claim of liberation theology. The Orthodox scholar Emmanuel Clapsis has written: "…in Christian tradition we have three distinct but equally important and inseparable sacramental ways of being in communion in God: the Word of God, the Divine Liturgy, and the mystery of the poor brethren". Emmanuel Clapsis, "Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition", in George P. Liacopulos (ed.), *Church and Society: Orthodox Christian Perspectives, Past Experiences and Modern Challenges (Studies in Honor of Rev. Dr. Demetrios J. Constantelos)*, (Boston: Somerset Hall Press, 2007), pp.87-107, here p.105.

[33] On this distinction, see Boff, *Teologia e Prática*, pp. 57–61 (ET, pp.14-16).

idolatry / ideology. In Boff's words, "the knowledge of Salvation is as little salvific as the knowledge of sugar is sweet".[34] In order to deal with the potential problem of ideology in theology more clearly, he borrows from the Althusserian School[35] and divides ideology into two types. The first which refers to the autonomous dimension of (in this case) theological knowledge he calls Ideology 1. This he defines as "a case not of pure and simple error, but of illusion, that is, of error which believes itself to be true".[36] The second mode of ideology is more related to practice than to theory: "the 'unjustifiable';… but *the unjustifiable under the guise of the justifiable*, it is a case of the immoral under the guise of the moral."[37] Here what is not, what has no positive force is proposed as something real.

How, then, do we deal with this ideology? Here Boff's second step comes into play, the Hermeneutical Mediation. He turns again to Althusser and his model of the generation of knowledge.[38] Althusser proposed three generalities or moments in the process of the production of knowledge. There is the initial product of knowledge, what he terms Generality 1, which we might term the raw material of knowledge. It is with this raw material that the process of knowledge production takes place – this process is the second Generality. Finally, there is a product which comes out of this, the third Generality. To give an example, theologians work (second Generality) with God's revelation contained in the Scriptures (first Generality) to produce a theological theory (for example, about the Incarnation, or Grace or whatever), which is the third generality. The second generality, what Boff calls the hermeneutic mediation, is the place where theology exercises its autonomy. One important point for Boff is to be aware of where we are operating. We should not claim autonomy where we are actually operating regionally, nor should we concede our autonomy.

Clodovis Boff's three-stage method involves using the socio-analytic mediation in order to achieve information about the socio-political reality, which in the hermeneutic mediation is subjected to the scrutiny of the Scriptures and Christian tradition, before, in the dialectical mediation, this too is brought into encounter with the praxis of engaged Christians. This introduces, at each part, safeguards to avoid the idolising of the poor. His use of the socio-analytic mediation stresses the regional nature of

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[34] Boff, *Teologia e Prática*, p. 62 (ET, p.17)

[35] Louis Althusser (1918 – 1990) was a French Marxist philosopher who wrote widely on the nature of knowledge and ideology, and who was one of Boff's conversation partners in his doctorate.

[36] Boff, *Teologia e Prática*, p.99 (ET, p.42).

[37] *Ibid*., p.100 (ET, p.42). Italics in original.

[38] *Ibid*, pp.145–150, (ET, pp.70-73). See on the use of generalities, Peter Phan, "Method in Liberation Theologies", *Theological Studies* 61/1 (2000), pp.40-63, here pp.52-54.

theological language, thus avoiding temptations to totality. The hermeneutic mediation, the questioning of the raw material presented by the social sciences, is a judgement which is, however, always two-way. The theologian judges the social according to the light of the Word, but the Word also stands in critical relation, not only to the socio-political reality but also to the theologian, who is not its sole possessor or proclaimer. Finally, the dialectic between theory and praxis means that there can be no simple reductionism. Theory, the production of theology, questions and is questioned by the praxis of Christians, and in the particular case of liberation theology, by the praxis of the poor.

Benefits and Problems of Boff's Method

This extremely brief overview of Boff's method raises the question as to how it can help liberation theology avoid becoming too quickly ideological, a criticism which has been made against it on numerous occasions.[39] The first significant advantage is that the dialectical encounter between theory and praxis requires that method remains open. Method, (*met-hodos)* the way which is followed, needs always to contain an *exodus*, a way out. A method is best if it helps us to see when to abandon it. Boff on several occasions speaks of an epistemological rupture between especially the first, socio-analytic, and the second, hermeneutic, mediation. It is this rupture which introduces dynamism into the method so that theology is not just a marginal gloss on a social sciences reading of poverty. The poor are never simply objects of social scientific research, but transcendence retains a place. This is because the poor are now considered from the viewpoint of the Scriptures and Tradition, and in that sense are irreducible.

The dialectic between theory and praxis is another important area. Whatever the theory has to say has to be tested in the often messy reality of Christian life. But at the same time, this reality also can lay no absolute claims. The Spirit cannot be reduced to one sphere or the other, but is always free to blow where it wills, to transform, challenge, question. So it is that all dialectic must remain non-synthesising, maintaining a tension which is creative and Spirit-filled. To recognise orthodoxy and orthopraxis as always relative to the limitless mystery of God is a good starting point against the temptation to totality and idolatry.

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[39] This has long been the position of the present Pope Benedict XVI who as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was responsible for a damning (if rather inaccurate) critique of liberation theology, the Instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'", issued in March 1984. See also Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Preliminary Notes on Liberation Theology", available at www. christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm (accessed 14/1/08). This in turn is extracted from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report,* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985).

At the same time, there are of course limits to Boff's method. Although he can allow for this non-synthesising dialectic, too often he is almost forced by his very strong causal logic[40] to move to a more linear conceptualisation of reality. Here the *exodus* is more visible in its absence, since the method sets too tightly the boundaries within which we can operate. Boff's insistence on the primacy of the *fides quae*, the positivity of faith, illustrates the danger. Of course we must start somewhere, and in that sense perhaps there is a governing pole for the dialectic, but if it governs too much, will it not become a totality which demands submission from the other poles?

The most serious problem, however, does not concern the steps of the method, but in Boff's understanding of what method is. He certainly sees his task as normative, but is the normative not necessarily ideological? It would seem to shut out anyone who does not follow it, and can only be employed by making oneself a slave to it. Now the exits are not like walking freely over a field, but like a motorway where I can only leave at places pre-determined by the planners and builders. But can such a method really avoid becoming an ideology? In terms of the relationship of liberation theology and the poor, the conviction that the poor need liberation is undoubtedly a good one, but does Boff's method for thinking about this theologically allow for the freedom of the poor? Or, does it need to be liberated from its own totality?

Here I return to Levinas and Marion. It is not a question of adding new bits to the method, which would simply exacerbate the difficulties. Rather, it is about enabling Boff's method to be more purposively self-challenging. Is it possible to allow the poor to remain other? It is best to start with a strong dose of humility, recognising that no method can ever ensure that this will happen. As in everything else, the theologian is utterly dependent on the grace of God. Nevertheless, we can work with God or against God, so there are things we can do which will help.

So, in the specific question of liberation theology and its relation to the poor, it must be said, even at the risk of misunderstanding, that the poor are not part of liberation theology. Liberation theologians, in their response to the command of the poor, may be subject to the poor, but they cannot assume the poor as a known problem needing resolution. Indeed, it is only to the extent that the poor are not reduced to totality that liberation

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[40] Boff is an heir to Aristotle, especially as reflected through Aquinas and to a lesser extent Marx.

theologians can make the necessary substitution, and become agents for the liberation of the poor.

In doing so, they must allow also for the encounter with the third, so that the desire of the just God that justice be for all[41] is proclaimed and practised. Theology, and especially the theology of liberation, remains, for this reason, pastoral and practical and the theologian is placed firmly within the world and context about which he or she theologises. This attention to the context will remind the theologians that the poor must never be defined solely by their poverty, since "poor" is only ever a partial descriptor. It is, as liberation theology has stressed since the outset, the whole person who needs liberation and salvation.[42]

Of key importance will be receptivity to the sheer givenness of the poor person, and the total readiness of the theologian to respond, and in doing so to discover herself or himself. In Marion's language, the poor person as iconic is a saturated phenomenon, always giving more than can be perceived, intuited, understood. The positive result of this is that the theological task is never complete. The God who reveals himself also in the lives of the other poor continues to be experienced and the journey to this our God is one which never ends. Through the givenness of the other poor we are always reminded of the infinite mystery of God's saving and loving presence.

Finally, and as already noted, the dialectic between theory and praxis, between the work of theology and the lives of the poor, should not desire any form of synthesis. This will not result in permanent inertia, though. The dialectic can advance without synthesis, precisely by embracing the tension of contradiction and difference. Unreflected activism will always end up doing nothing, or doing harm, whilst any theology that does not contribute to the condemnation of the God-denying practices of injustice is failing to speak the gospel. The relationship between theology and praxis must remain in the precariousness and tension of dialectic, for ultimately it is not our convictions about God, but only God himself who can have the final word.

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[41] See on this José María Vigil, "A opção pelos pobres é opção pela justiça, e não é preferencial. Para um reenquadramento teológico-sistemático da opção pelos pobres", *Perspectiva Teológica* 36 (2004), pp.241-252. English version: www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/371e. html

[42] See, for example, Clodovis Boff and Leonardo Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, (trans. Robert Barr), (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984).

McClendon/McClendonism: Methodology or Ideology?

David McMillan

Abstract

This paper addresses the question of whether the work of McClendon is to be seen as a useful methodological approach in the context of research or a paradigm through which a subject is to be understood and redefined in terms of McClendonian categories? The question highlights the difference between appreciation of McClendon as providing a useful methodological perspective and the possible appropriation of McClendon's work as an ideology. The purpose of this paper will be to tease out something of this appreciation / appropriation and methodological / ideological distinction in the context of academic research.

Key words: McClendon; Methodology; Ideology; Research

Appreciation or Appropriation?

The question addressed in this paper is whether the work of McClendon is to be seen as a useful methodological approach in the context of research or, as a paradigm through which a subject is to be understood and redefined in terms of McClendonian categories. The purpose of this paper will be to highlight the difference between appreciation of McClendon as providing a useful methodological perspective and appropriation of McClendon's work in an ideological fashion.

There is always a tension between adopting a hermeneutic or perspective as the chosen vehicle through which to investigate a phenomenon and the application of a particular hermeneutic or perspective to a particular phenomenon.[1] How, in practice, are 'conversation partners' and their particular hermeneutic or perspective best engaged in academic research? Are they to be used as 'masters' to guide the thoughts and analysis of the investigator or are they themselves to be subjected to critical evaluation during the process of inquiry? If it is the latter, then we must be open to the possibility that a conversation partner has little or nothing to

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[1] Yoder illustrates this kind of tension when, in a discussion on moral reasoning, he comments: 'The academic discussion of moral reasoning—like the academic discussion of almost anything else—tends to be dominated by a search for first principles' (p.77). Yoder argues that a phenomenological approach to consideration of moral reasoning is, 'less subject to a *a priori* bias than one which claims through some prior definitional ("foundational,," methodological, "meta-ethical") move to have avoided the pitfall of particular identity...'(p.79). J H Yoder, 'Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism', in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

offer and their schemes, insights and proposals do not actually shed very much light on the subject. If we are open to such a possibility, what then is the primary nature of the research? Is it to gain understanding and insight into a chosen theme, or is it to take a theme, a context or a group of conversation partners and consider if they have anything to contribute to the analysis of the chosen subject? What, or who, is being investigated?

Perhaps more importantly, the question is, if the bulk of research undertaken within this institution were to assume or follow McClendon's theological programme,[2] would there not be a danger that it could attain the status of an ideology? If this were the case then the integrity, validity and usefulness of 'research' within the institution becomes questionable. The institution becomes an ideological training ground in which research serves to reinforce the autonomy of the ideology as it is applied over against all other situations. In these circumstances objective theological research becomes compromised. Then again, can there be such a thing as 'objective theological research' or objective research of any kind? Clearly, as Parush Parushev shows, 'any critical interpretation is historically, culturally and linguistically contextual and narrative dependent'. However, is there a danger that, by assuming critical reasoning to be 'story-formed reasoning',[3] the researcher becomes inclined to appropriate the master storytellers of the tradition as their hermeneutical lens and reduces the possibility of critical engagement and critical self-evaluation?[4] So, the question returns: When particular conversation partners are preferred in the context of inquiry, how are they engaged? Are they appropriated or appreciated?

At this stage it is time to set aside the question and begin to explore the terms ideology and methodology before returning to the question posed at the outset and offering some suggestions or conclusions.

Ideology

Simon Blackburn defines ideology in terms of a 'system of beliefs' or 'categories that provide the foundations of programmes of political or

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[2] Parushev comments, 'McClendon is to be credited with being one of the first to derive plausible "anti-foundational" systematic implications for a theological method...' Parush R Parushev, 'Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning', in *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*, ed. Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creanga, Brian Brock (Praha: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), p.36.

[3] Parushev, 'Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning', p.32.

[4] Parushev would not condone this approach as he makes clear his concern to discern how 'we walk the narrow path between the Scylla of truth-telling with integrity and Charybdis of personal and community bias'. Ibid., p.43.

social action'.[5] This view is supported, although expressed slightly differently, by Peter Railton who identifies the nature of an ideology as 'a collection of beliefs and values held by an individual or group for other than purely epistemic reasons e.g. bourgeois ideology, nationalist ideology, or gender ideology'.[6] Railton goes on to point out that the normative use of the term ideology usually has two aspects to it, namely 'explanation' and 'criticism'. As 'explanation' the term ideology is applied where particular beliefs and values are held to by individuals or groups for practical reasons rather than for epistemological reasons. As 'criticism' the term is used to critique the beliefs and values for their lack of epistemological basis and to highlight the vested interests that sustain such beliefs. So while the term may in theory be used dispassionately to refer to a way of thinking or set of beliefs, it tends to be used to highlight the irrational, or at least inconclusive, basis on which a way of thinking or set of beliefs is constructed and applied. It also tends to assume that somewhere there is a vested interest at work in adopting and sustaining the ideology.

While Railton has used the terms 'explanation' and 'criticism' to identify the uses of ideology in reference to particular ways or schemes of thinking, we can appropriate his two terms to consider the nature of how ideologies actually work. In his exploration of the concept of idolatry, Tim Noble identified two expressions of idolatry—an internal (Idolatry 1) and an external (Idolatry 2)[7]. Noble sees parallels[8] with Clodovis Boff's dual classification of ideology which Boff suggests has both an autonomous dimension (Ideology 1) and what we might call a delusional dimension (Ideology 2).[9] The characteristics of Idolatry 1 and Idolatry 2 are a tendency , in the former, to 'rein in' the transcendence of God[10] and in the latter to indulge in the self-deception that a particular theological scheme has encompassed all that is necessary—another form of 'reining in'. Idolatry 2 refers to the external expression of idolatry in which that which is true and real (God) is replaced with what is made and constructed, either

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[5] Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Oxford Paperback Reference (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.178.

[6] P Railton, 'Ideology', in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.392.

[7] Tim Noble, *Keeping the Window Open: The Theological Method of Clodovis Boff and the Problem of the Alterity of the Poor,* (Praha: International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2009), p.81-2.

[8] Ibid., p.125. While Noble sees useful parallels between his work on idolatry and Boff's on ideology he does not conflate the two. Using a rather succinct quote from Manemann, 'idolatry has to be understood as a form of mimesis which makes itself like the environment, whereas ideologies are more kinds of false projection that make the environment like itself", Noble seeks to maintain a distinction between the two terms.

[9] Ibid., p.119.

[10] Ibid., p.82. Noble explains his use of The Transcendent as a reference to 'God in his absolute Otherness, the irreducibility of God to any other category or class'.

literally or conceptually (idols), but is worshipped as if both real and true. Ideology 2, according to Boff's scheme, presents *'the unjustifiable under the guise of the justifiable'*.[11]   Noble concludes that 'ideology is a specific conceptual form of idolatry'.[12]

Noble then helpfully draws attention to the work of Libanio and Taborda and their consideration of what an ideology is and how an ideology develops over three phases—the intuitive, the 'common sense' and the rejection. In the course of his summary of these phases Noble makes two helpful observations. The first is that in the intuitive stage of the development of an ideology, the new ideas being developed and expressed may not be 'entirely wrong, but in believing them to be entirely right there is an illusion'.[13] In the second or 'common sense' phase, an ideology becomes 'so firmly entrenched that it considers itself above criticism, as self-evident to all'.[14] This, he rightly suggests, is as much a problem for theology as for all other disciplines.

If the term ideology is used normatively to 'explain' and 'criticise' a structure of thought or set of beliefs we can equally say that what an ideology does as a structure of thought or set of beliefs is to explain the world within its compass and to criticise all other possible explanations of the world within that compass. Noble observes, and thereby concurs with the caveats outlined by Blackburn and Railton, that '...ideologies ...serve as organising and structuring principles or hermeneutical keys for the understanding of the world'.[15] It follows that there is no area of knowledge or form of knowing that is not under some element of ideological influence.

In the physical sciences the compass of an ideology may represent a very narrow field of investigation, but in the social sciences and in theology, the breadth of the compass tends to extend to all of humankind, the world and the universe. Most, if not all, systematic theologies tend to provide a total world view or at least a comprehensive way of viewing the whole world. The gap between being 'a' theology or way of thinking theologically and being an ideology that explains and criticises 'whatever else there is'[16] is wafer thin. When a theology preceded by an indefinite article is used uncritically, particularly in the context of research, the

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[11] Ibid., p.119. Boff quoted in Noble, italics his.
[12] Ibid., p.120.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p.121.
[16] The phrase is borrowed from McClendon's definition of theology. James W McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol.1*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 23.

indefinite article becomes a mere linguistic gloss. The theology has become, for those who fail to be critical, an ideology.

Both Blackburn and Railton highlight problems in the identification and critique of any ideology. Blackburn comments:

> Promises that political philosophy and morality can be freed from ideology are apt to be vain, since allegedly cleansed and pure programmes depend, for instance, upon particular views of human nature, what counts as human flourishing, and the conditions under which it is found.[17]

Clearly these 'views' and assumptions to which he alludes are precisely that, views and assumptions, not objective, definitive knowledge. Therefore, to what degree is any critique of an ideology, ideology-free? Railton poses a similar question, '...if a belief is labeled an ideology, what assumptions are being made about the existence of an objective standpoint from which to judge a belief as ideological given the "social character of knowledge"?'

Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of providing an ideology-free critique of what may be conceived of as an ideology, the task is not without purpose and value particularly in the context of academic research. Failure to address the danger of a hermeneutic or methodology becoming an ideology invites the development of a compromised research base and any academic enquiry should surely be open to addressing this potential ideological spiral.

Methodology

The term methodology can be employed in at least three different ways—as description, as convention or as prescription.[18] It can be used to describe a practice of investigation, the conventions that pertain to a particular mode of investigation or normatively to prescribe the terms of what would be considered as valid investigation. In addition, there are clearly a variety of methodological approaches, each of which is influenced or shaped by a way of thinking or structure of thought.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison begin their consideration of methodologies by stating that:

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[17] Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.178.
[18] N Cartwright, T Childers, and R F Hendry, 'Methodology', *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995): p.565.

> ...ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions; these, in turn give rise to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection. This view ...recognizes that research is concerned with understanding the world and that this is informed by how we view our world(s), what we take understanding to be, and what we see as the purposes of understanding.[19]

Writing from within the world of practical theology and qualitative research, in his discussion on the question of how to develop a methodology for Practical Theology, Swinton offers the following:

> …the overarching methodological framework within which Practical Theology takes place is theology. Theology offers a perspective on knowledge, truth and reality which constantly brings it into conflict with other methodologies, including the interpretive paradigm.[20]

It seems to me there is both a usefulness and a difficulty with Swinton's statement as compared to that of Cohen, Manion and Morrison. It is useful in that on the surface it states the obvious, that is, that a prior theological commitment will determine the methodological options. Swinton believes that Practical Theology should work within an interpretive paradigm as opposed to that of positivism, which clearly leads to the appropriation of different methods. He also recognises, however, that within the interpretive paradigm there are a variety of ontological and epistemological possibilities leading to different methodologies, not all of which are open to the researcher coming from a faith perspective. The difficulty with Swinton's statement, on the other hand, is that it seems to imply that theology, unlike methodology, precedes ontology and epistemology. The relationship is not that simple. Theologies are themselves shaped and influenced by ontological and epistemological understanding as expressed within traditions. We now have a new and pressing question: How are we to understand the relationship between ontology, epistemology, theology and methodology and how do we prevent a theological paradigm from becoming an ideology that negates the process of rigorous critical inquiry?

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[19] Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge Falmer, 2000), p.3-7. They identify ontological assumptions as being concerned with the nature or essence of the phenomena being investigated; epistemology as the basis of knowledge and how it is both acquired and communicated (p.5-6); and then explore the distinction between the subjectivist or objectivist approaches in the social sciences that lead to very different methodologies which they summarise as idiographic and nomothetic. (p.7)

[20] John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p.76.

Paradigms and Convictions

Guba and Lincoln provide some helpful direction in seeking to answer the question of how we are to understand the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology. In their discussion on the nature of paradigms they begin with the statement that paradigms can be thought of as 'Basic Belief Systems Based on Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Assumptions'.[21] Their definition of a paradigm is characterised as 'a set of basic beliefs' or a 'worldview'[22] which encompasses how individuals understand themselves in relation to the world and all the other possible sets of relationships that arise from being in the world. When it comes to inquiry, the relationship between ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations is of critical importance. They observe that these three elements are 'interconnected in such a way that the answer to any one question, taken in any order, constrains how the others may be answered'.[23] Hence, the methodological approach is hugely dependent upon what the inquirer believes it is possible to know and what kind of knowledge the inquirer considers desirable or possible. The combination of these elements can be identified as the paradigm within which the inquirer operates and that paradigm is, of necessity, not capable of being proven in any ultimate sense as 'the' paradigm for inquiry.

What is of particular interest is that a decade on, in the 2005 edition of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Guba and Lincoln revised their work considerably. It is not that they restyle the basic elements of their definition of paradigms, but they do consider there to be further issues in understanding elements and function of paradigms. They state that in reviewing their work they would now '...make values, or more correctly, axiology, the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics and religion, a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal'.[24] Having reflected on the role that values play in the decision making process of inquirers,[25] axiology becomes the fourth member of the network—ontology, epistemology, methodology and

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[21] E G Guba and Y S Lincoln, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K Denzin, and Yvonna S Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), p.107.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p.108.

[24] ———, 'Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences', in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. 3rd Ed*, ed. Norman K Denzin, and Yvonna S Lincoln. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), p.200.

[25] They argue that values are inextricably linked in the 'choice of problem, choice of paradigm to guide the problem, choice of theoretical framework, choice of major data-gathering and data-analytic methods, choice of context, treatment of values already resident within the context, and choice of format(s) for presenting the findings'. Ibid., p.119-200.

axiology. A critical element of their discovery was that ethics are embedded within paradigms and are not merely external to them. Indeed, they have come to the view that there is a necessary 'dialogue about the role of spirituality in human inquiry'[26] that needs to be fostered in the world of research.

At this point we turn to the work of James McClendon. Central (or dare we say foundational?) to McClendon's theological method is the outcome of the work undertaken along with James Smith in their study of convictions.[27] On the basis of their exploration of Speech Act Theory[28] they sought to demonstrate that there exists a useful 'apparatus'[29] that could be applied to the study of religious beliefs in the context of the examination of basic convictions[30] and conviction sets. I have argued elsewhere that

> It is the development of the concept of convictions set in the broader context of consideration of speech-acts, narrative (the story formed nature of a community) and tradition that endues McClendon and Smith's approach with roundedness and suitability for use as an investigative methodology and not just theoretical abstraction.[31]

While coming from different perspectives and contexts[32] there are interesting parallels between Guba and Lincoln's paradigms and McClendon and Smith's convictions or conviction sets. Both approaches recognise the pluralist nature of understanding in so far as there is no one ultimate paradigm or convictional set. McClendon and Smith's assertion that 'convictions are a species of belief, intending by "belief" to indicate that they are cognitive as well as conative and affective—convictions are

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[26] Ibid., p.200.

[27] James William McClendon and James M Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994).

[28] McClendon and Smith drew extensively on the work of J L Austin whom they described as '...a philosophical iconoclast who took a certain pleasure in overturning what had been considered central doctrines in philosophy...' but whose work on Speech Act theory provided both a means of analysis of convictions and a means of justification or otherwise of those convictions. Ibid., p.47.

[29] Ibid., p.83.

[30] Their definition of a conviction is '...a persistent belief such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before'. Ibid., p.5. On conviction sets they say '...we will refer to the set of all convictions held by a person as that person's *conviction set* and to the set of all convictions held in common by members of a community as the community's (shared) conviction set'. McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.91.

[31] D McMillan, 'Convictions, Scripture and Conflict: More Questions than Answers', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 10/1 (2009), p.39.

[32] McClendon and Smith come from a philosophical tradition and perspective engaging in what they describe as 'theological-philosophical dialogue' (McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.ix). Guba and Lincoln identify themselves as social constructivists/constructionist social scientists, (Guba, 'Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences', p.197).

about what we think as well as what we hope or feel'[33] corresponds with Guba and Lincoln's recognition of the need to include axiology among the core formative elements of a paradigm. Both would therefore recognise that, as Railton expresses it, the presence of beliefs and values in paradigms or conviction sets means they may be held for other than purely epistemic reasons.[34]

While lacking McClendon and Smith's concern to work towards possibilities of justification of convictions[35] Guba and Lincoln, having identified themselves as social constructivists/constructionists, state that they understand constructivism as an inquiry which aims towards the:

> ...understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve. The criterion for progress is that, over time, everyone formulates more informed and sophisticated constructions and becomes more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions.[36]

While McClendon and Smith's perspectivism[37] and Guba and Lincoln's constructivism are clearly not synonymous, the former assuming the task of striving for justification of convictions and the latter assuming a more relativist position, they share a similar understanding of the constituent elements of what they respectively call convictions and paradigms and share a not dissimilar strategy of inquiry. McClendon and Smith were already developing their perspectival approach to theology from a philosophical base in the early 1970s[38] around the time of the

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[33] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.6.

[34] Railton, 'Ideology', p.392.

[35] McClendon and Smith state: 'The end of understanding ...is justification. ...The problems that most interest us are the discovery and description of common elements among convictional communities and the development of a theory to provide a basis for the justification of convictions, especially religious convictions'. McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.17. In the opinion of Guba and Lincoln, 'Knowledge accumulates only in a relative sense through the formation of ever more informed and sophisticated constructions via the hermeneutical/dialectical process...' (Guba, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', p.114).

[36] Guba, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', p.113. Guba and Lincoln go on to affirm that the reconstructions so constructed '...are subject to continuous revision,' in the context of ongoing inquiry.

[37] McClendon and Smith identify themselves as honest perspectivists. Rejecting a relativist position, they take their consciousness of pluralism to mean that '...one holds that people may be conscious of their convictionally plural existence in such a way that that consciousness contains the possibility of transcending the singular perspective of its owners. ...The pluralism that we envisage, then, does not obviate justification nor require narrowness of outlook, but it does require that the pluralism itself shall be internalized, so that it becomes a factor that my convictions take into account' (McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.173-4). McClendon states in *Witness* that, 'Perspectivism makes room for rival truth claims and other rival value-claims. Indeed it assumes there will be such rivalry' (*Witness* p.54).

[38] See, for example, on the bibliographic page of *Convictions* the acknowledgement of sections of chapters previously published as articles as early as 1970. See also McClendon's preface to the second edition of James W McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's*

emergence of the interpretive and critical paradigms that Denzin and Lincoln refer to as the 'reformist movement'[39] that gave rise to the explosion of interest in qualitative research. While each is distinctive, the work of McClendon and Smith appears as a coherent, rigorous and useful non-foundational but also non-relativist investigative methodology ahead of what has now become generally accepted as the qualitative research paradigm. It can be argued that McClendon offers not only a coherent, rigorous and useful non-foundational investigative methodology, but does so with the integrity of a location within a faith tradition which he articulates as 'the baptist vision'[40] providing both a philosophically-robust and theologically-located mode of inquiry. He has articulated something of his location within the baptist vision, the prejudice and perspectives arising from that rootedness. Moreover, as we have seen, he has articulated the hope and expectation that such a clear articulation of convictions should not be a barrier to investigation or new understandings arising from living in a plural world of ideas and paradigms.

McClendon offers an approach to theological reflection and investigation that takes cognisance of the danger of the self-deceit that understanding can be gained in an objectively-detached manner without reference to our situatedness.[41]The researcher cannot ignore his or her own locatedness within a different narrative tradition, demanding, therefore, a measure of humility if research is to be conducted without absolutist or relativist[42] hermeneutical notions.

McClendon's overt locatedness within the baptist vision is, understandably, perceived as a weakness by those seeking to do theology from an Enlightenment perspective,[43] but must surely be considered a

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Theology, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), in which he makes clear that the ideas that ultimately issued in *Biography* began '...in another cultural generation. It was the era of Vietnam'.
[39] Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks ; London: Sage Publications, 2005), p.x.
[40] For McClendon's opening discussion on 'the baptist vision' see pages 26-34 of McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol.1*.
[41] Alasdair C MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p.212. MacIntyre argues that our own lives are lived out and understood in the context of narratives and therefore '...the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told ...'
[42] See McClendon and Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, p.8, for discussion of the terms *imperialism* and *relativism* in this context.
[43] M L Stackhouse, '*Review of Ethics: Systematic Theology,* Vol.1. by James W. Mcclendon, Jr. Abingdon Press, 1986. 384 Pages', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987): p.617. Stackhouse comments that McClendon's use of Hauerwas, Yoder and Burrell has 'given him the intellectual permission to abandon a good bit of the theology he had previously learned and to state what he really believes'(p.616). He also states that McClendon has 'shown me why I am not a "baptist", and why I hope the current fascination with narrative theology does not become predominant' (ibid). The full relevant quote is as follows: 'I suspect that what is at stake in this new fascination with narrative ethics

positive strength by those seeking to do theology from a phenomenological, narrative or inductive approach. Indeed, it could surely be argued that to fail to do theology within a non-foundationalist paradigm without an articulation of locatedness would imply an objectivity in investigation that the paradigm itself denies in theory.

Although referring to McClendon as 'something of an iconoclast when it comes to method',[44] Barry Harvey considers McClendon's approach as 'a rich resource' when it comes to the questions of relevance, pluralism and truth in seeking to come to terms with 'Christianity's doctrinal heritage'.[45] Harvey shares the view that:

> Theology takes its stand not on some purported set of universal principles derived from a mythical 'mid-air' position, but as one of the many practices that constitute the ongoing life and language of the church.[46]

Preferring the metaphor of getting our feet wet[47] when doing theology, Harvey affirms that even when we begin in the middle of things there are strategies to ensure that our locatedness neither annuls criticality nor ensnares in relativism, as the convictions from which investigation is undertaken can be revised, informed or transformed in the process.

Conclusion

It is probably appropriate, in a very small way, to mirror McClendon's own practice at this point. Rather than proceed to argue in purely conceptual terms we will indulge in a little biography, or at least witness, by way of expressing a methodological practice that illustrates appreciation rather than ideological appropriation.

Our witness is Ched Myers author of *Binding the Strong Man*, a commentary on Mark's gospel and its sequel, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* Myers refers to *Who Will Roll Away...* as a work in theology and comments that, given the challenges in doing theology, 'Fortunately for me, what little theological method I know I learned from James W. McClendon, Jr'.[48] Myers highlights McClendon's 'four essential

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and theology is simply a new, sophisticated version of "testifying". Many Protestants will remember prayer meetings when people were called upon to "testify" as to how they have found providential holiness in their lives. Such things may be evidences of a personal faith or group piety, but are they ethics? Are they theology? Perhaps future volumes will clear up these questions'.

[44]B Harvey, 'Doctrinally Speaking: James McClendon on the Nature of Doctrine', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27, no. 1 (2000): p.40.

[45] Ibid. p.39.

[46] B Harvey, 'Beginning in the Middle of Things: James Mcclendon's Systematic Theology', *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (2002): p.252.

[47] Ibid, p.253.

[48] Ched Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone? : Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), p.xxii.

characteristics'[49] of theology; namely that theology is pluralistic, narrative based, rational and self-involving. Building on McClendon's definition of theology in relation to convictions Myers sets out to expose 'the roots of our socio-political and historical pathologies in the First World' and recover 'the roots of our discipleship tradition'.[50] Working from the narrative based nature of theology Myers follows the practice of correlation advocated by McClendon which is to correlate our experience with Mark's narrative, focusing on how that narrative 'reads us'[51] as opposed to correlating our experience to the text. Developing McClendon's insistence that theology must be rational, Myers coins the phrase 'the *critical* and *careful* character of theology'.[52] By this he means that theology must 'test its own internal coherency and its relation to competing discourses and claims', which is precisely what 'distinguishes theology from sheer ideological advocacy...'[53] This criticality must be turned inward as well as outward, a process that is often missing. Finally, Myers acknowledges that theological discourse cannot be carried on as if it were 'above' the contexts of culture, race, class and gender and even the location of the investigator, 'I argue that in order for our theology to be more contextual and literate we must learn to take the texts of our own lives at least as seriously as we do official narratives about the world'.[54]

Myers' reflection on, and thoughtful, critical appropriation of, McClendon's work allows him to be able to express his own theological method as constituent; correlative, careful and contextual, recognising that 'Like all theology, it is a conversation in progress.'[55] He has learned well from his teacher. In *Witness* McClendon acknowledges his own debt to the work of Tillich, Hartt and Yoder. He considers their work to be on a trajectory which he then likens to a three stranded cord given strength by the combination and interweaving of its parts. McClendon then states, 'This is the cord I mean to extend if I can.'[56] He is clear about his own locatedness, his indebtedness and his intention to extend the critical analysis he inherits, the very pattern followed by Myers. Myers recognises that the greatest expression of appreciation to McClendon's schooling him in theology is to absorb the concepts, explore the possibilities and to rework the ideas to tackle fresh challenges rather than to use McClendon's categories as a means of describing the aspect of the world under

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, p.xxiii
[51] Ibid, p.xxiv
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, p.xxvi
[55] Ibid.
[56] *Witness,* p.49

investigation, for that would be nothing other than 'sheer ideological advocacy'. Myers also recognises that faithfulness is marked by moving on, not harking back.

At the beginning of this paper, we began by asking whether the work of McClendon is to be seen as a useful methodological approach to understanding and insight in the context of research or whether the work of McClendon is a paradigm ideology through which an area or object of investigation is to be understood and redefined in terms of McClendonian categories. A subsequent issue arose which we framed in the following terms: How are we to understand the relationship between ontology, epistemology, theology and methodology and how do we avoid a theological paradigm, a way of seeing, becoming an ideology that negates the process of rigorous critical inquiry?

In the course of our inquiry a number of issues have become clear. Our reflection on ideologies indicates that the gap between 'a' theology or way of thinking theologically and an ideology that explains and criticises 'everything else there is' is sometimes wafer thin. Furthermore, when a theology preceded by an indefinite article is used uncritically, particularly in the context of research, the indefinite article becomes a mere linguistic gloss—the theology has become, for those who fail to be critical, an ideology. We noted that theological perspectives are themselves shaped and influenced by ontological and epistemological understanding as expressed within traditions, which raises the question of their interrelatedness in the development of methodologies.

A consideration of the concepts of paradigms and convictions provided helpful ways of recognising—even if it is not always possible to observe or define the interaction—that the interrelatedness of ontology, epistemology, values and theology are manifested in the world of human interaction and investigation. We sought to demonstrate that, in the light of this, McClendon provides not only a coherent, rigorous and useful non-foundational investigative methodology but does so with the integrity of a self-conscious location within a faith tradition which he articulates as 'the baptist vision' providing both a philosophically-robust and theologically-located mode of inquiry in which a clear articulation of convictions should not be a barrier to investigation or new understandings arising from living in a plural world of ideas and paradigms.

Insofar as McClendon's contribution and theological programme is critiqued, further refined, developed and placed in competition with other perspectives, we can assume that there is a healthy appreciation of

McClendon's work. Should such critique, refinement, development or challenge be absent then undoubtedly there is the prospect, or likelihood, of an unhealthy appropriation of McClendon's work and the emergence of an ideological McClendonism.

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Authoritative Mennonite Brethren:
The Convergence of Church Polity, Ordination, and Women in Leadership

Doug Heidebrecht

Abstract

This article investigates the way in which the Mennonite Brethren General Conference addressed the issue of women in church leadership, and shows how on each of these occasions a number of unresolved convictional tensions were being played out. It also indicates how these conversations must be understood as part of the attempt by Mennonite Brethren to contextualize their leadership practices in the midst of changing circumstances. Once the ethnic boundaries separating Mennonite Brethren from the wider culture dissolved, their intuitive theology, even though it is coupled with a vigorous biblicism, was unable to provide a robust theological identity.

Key words: Mennonite Brethren; General Conference; Women's Ordination; Convictional Theologies; Contextualisation

The debate among Mennonite Brethren regarding the role of women in the church during the last fifty years revolves primarily around their attempts to delineate women's place within church leadership structures and only secondarily around whether women can be involved in specific ministry functions or activities. This fundamental concern reflects an intriguing convergence of the conversation regarding women in church leadership with shifting practices of church governance among Mennonite Brethren and ongoing questions regarding how to recognize authoritative leaders within the church. At the heart of this swirling convergence is a surprisingly ambiguous and often unarticulated ecclesiology.

I will examine three instances when the issue of women in the church was addressed by the Mennonite Brethren General Conference, which was comprised of all American and Canadian Mennonite Brethren churches. At each occasion, contemporaneous transitions in church polity and attempts to define ordination practices suggest that questions concerning women represent unresolved convictional tensions among Mennonite Brethren about the nature of the church itself. These moments also reveal Mennonite Brethren attempting to contextualize their leadership practices in the midst of changing circumstances and in response to shifting values and attitudes.

New Beginnings in North America - 1878-1879

Mennonite Brethren emerged as a distinct movement in 1860 within the Molotschna Mennonite colony in southern Ukraine as a result of a decision by eighteen families to secede from the larger Mennonite community.[1] Just over a decade later, a small number from this fledging movement, about 400, joined 18,000 Mennonites who decided to immigrate to the United States between 1874 and 1880.[2] Small scattered Mennonite Brethren congregations began to establish themselves in the mid-west states, despite a lack of strong leadership and the presence of both religious ferment and inner tensions.[3] An attempt to bring Mennonite Brethren together in this new land first took place in September 1878, when eleven men from Kansas and Nebraska gathered in order to address questions facing their churches.[4] A second meeting, held a year later in October 1879, was recognized as the beginning of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches because 'official ordained Mennonite Brethren ministers' were finally present, having just arrived from Russia that year.[5]

At both of these meetings, questions regarding the place of women in the church were raised, which is intriguing, given that Mennonite Brethren would not address the role of women in the church again for another 75 years. Alongside questions concerning the Lord's Supper, excommunication, the method of baptism, appropriate greetings, and participation in military service, the informal group meeting in 1878 agreed that women were not allowed to attend church gatherings nor participate in home prayers with their heads uncovered.[6] Presumably the practice of head coverings was being abandoned in some congregations. Debate regarding whether the biblical injunction for head coverings applied only to married women or whether decisions about practice in the home should not be better left to individual discretion, reflected the presence of differing opinions at the meeting.[7] Their restrictive ruling, however, harkened back to the more familiar delineation of roles experienced in Russia.

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[1] See John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 34-35.

[2] See Kevin Enns-Rempel, 'Coming to North America: The Immigrants of the 1870s,' in *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002*, eds. Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno: Historical Commission, 2002), p. 16.

[3] Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 132.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[5] Clarence Hiebert, 'The Development of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America – Some Reflections, Interpretations and Viewpoints,' in *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History*, ed. Paul Toews (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies/Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1977), p. 126.

[6] Minutes of the Mennonite Brethren Conference in Hamilton County, Nebraska, September 28-October 1, 1878, translated by Evangeline Kroeker, p. 4.

[7] *Ibid.*

A year later, in October 1879, twenty-four delegates again addressed questions about the appropriateness of women attending church meetings.[8] They agreed that 'sisters could take part in services as God's Spirit leads,' however, they were not permitted to hold teaching positions and were required 'to keep silent in Brother deliberations.'[9] This particular decision raised a subsequent question regarding whether women could be allowed to vote for a teacher or an elder, and the answer was left to the responsibility of each local congregation to decide for themselves.[10]

At both of these gatherings questions about leadership within their struggling communities were also addressed. In 1878, the affirmation of the authority of local leaders who were faithful to the Scriptures reflected a consistent application of the leadership model developed earlier by Mennonite Brethren in South Russia.[11] In 1879, delegates recognized the interdependence of churches when they required an elder from another Mennonite Brethren church to perform ordinations instead of allowing churches to ordain their own ministers.[12]

These two conferences illustrate how new circumstances arising from their immigration to North America created uncertainty for Mennonite Brethren regarding their practice. The convergence of these particular questions regarding women in the church, church polity, and ordination may not seem significant in retrospect, yet they were issues reflecting real concerns for these recent immigrants. While they were able to reaffirm shared convictions through conversation together, they were also willing to allow for diversity of practice on matters not directly addressed in Scripture. Overall, their decisions reflected the desire to live out their faith in this new setting in a manner consistent with their experience in Russia.

Two observations are important to recognize. First, these recent Mennonite Brethren immigrants to the United States assumed a church polity that reflected early Mennonite Brethren practice, which had been established already in Russia. The initial Mennonite Brethren secessionists emphasized the importance of the priesthood of all believers, in part

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[8] Minutes of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference in York County, Nebraska, October 18-21, 1879, translated by Evangeline Kroeker, p. 6-8.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Minutes of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, 1878, p. 4. In regards to 'exercising authority over a leader,' they agreed 'not to dictate to any leaders their duties...[but] to permit the leader to guide us according to God's Word.'

[12] Minutes of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference, 1879, p. 8.

because none of them were ordained leaders or held any religious office.[13] It was only in 1865 that Mennonite Brethren defined their understanding of leadership and church polity by establishing a 'multiple lay ministry' model:

> The church chooses the minister, a brother from her midst who is considered capable and has the confidence of the church, to watch over them, thus it is the duty of the minister to serve the church and carry out whatever decision the church may make. In return, the church is obligated to obey her minister as the shepherd of her soul as long as he remains true to the pure teaching of Christ.[14]

A group of ministers consisting of all the ordained leaders in the local church provided leadership, which, though hierarchical, was tempered by shared authority and 'strong congregational involvement in deliberations and decision-making.'[15] The strengths of this 'multiple lay' model of leadership included an emphasis on the 'active participation of all members of the congregation' and the accountability of a consultative body of leaders to a community hermeneutic informed by a staunch biblicism.[16] As B.J. Braun notes, 'there seems to be no evidence that they were aware of the existence of well-defined church polities. Their governing principles were taken from the Bible and applied rather literally in all simplicity.'[17]

The establishment of the first General Conference in Russia in 1872 reflected the felt need to come together in order to address shared concerns and facilitate corporate ventures.[18] Mennonite Brethren ordained their first elder in 1868, essentially as a district superintendent, however, by 1902 the newly adopted *Confession of Faith* defined elders as moderators or leaders of local churches and the idea of an overseeing office was eventually abandoned.[19] Mennonite Brethren congregational polity, however, reflected

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[13] See Richard G. Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination: Church Types and Their Implications for Mennonite Brethren History* (Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1985), p. 7; and Abe J. Dueck, 'Church Leadership: A Historical Perspective,' *Direction* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1990): p. 18-27.

[14] Peter M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910) (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), p. 437. See also Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 303-305.

[15] J.B. Toews, 'The Church Growth Theory and Mennonite Brethren Polity,' *Direction* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1991): p. 106.

[16] See J.B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), p. 62; and Richard Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century: Ecclesiological Developments,' in *Bridging Troubled Waters: Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century*, ed. Paul Toews (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995), p. 204.

[17] B.J. Braun, 'The Scriptural Teaching on Organization and Government of the Local Church' (paper presented at the M.B. Study Conference, Denver, July 1958), p. 6.

[18] See Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 76; and Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination*, p. 81.

[19] See Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 71, 304-305.

an inherent tension: local congregations worked closely together with other churches but they were also 'autonomous in respect to internal affairs.'[20]

The second observation regarding these Mennonite Brethren immigrants is that they encountered a very different environment in the United States than they had anticipated. Part of the motivation underlying the Mennonite exodus during the 1870s was the threat of Russification and the appeal of re-establishing isolated and independent communities on the American frontier.[21] Attempts at establishing this utopian ideal were soon abandoned, which left these Mennonite immigrants without the means for effectively controlling socialization and, ironically, vulnerable to the process of Americanization.[22] Despite leaders' warnings about the lures of 'worldliness,' this process of acculturation not only challenged Mennonite Brethren traditional teachings and practices but also promoted a kind of individual and group permissiveness that they had not experienced before.[23] Mennonite Brethren were surprisingly susceptible to the pressure of American acculturation because they 'lived by an intuitive theology emerging from an experiential emphasis rooted in a strong biblicism.'[24] As their social and cultural boundaries began to dissipate, Mennonite Brethren tended to look outside their community for answers to the new questions they faced.

These early questions regarding women's involvement in the church need to be understood both in light of this new American setting and the effort by Mennonite Brethren to be faithful to their recently established congregational polity. The tension between congregational interdependence and autonomy is reflected in the pressure to conform to conference decisions and the freedom to allow for differing practices. These early conference records highlight the intentional process of communal discernment engaged in by Mennonite Brethren in an attempt to live out their convictions.

Changing Church Practices – 1957

In 1957, an almost sixty year practice of ordaining women to both home and foreign missions was rescinded by the Mennonite Brethren General

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[20] Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination*, p. 71.
[21] Hiebert, 'The Development of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America,' p. 115-116.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 117, 120.
[24] Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 180.

Conference as part of a larger recommendation regarding ordination.[25] A brief rationale was provided to convention delegates:

> That in view of the fact that we as an M.B. Church, on the basis of clearly conceived scriptural convictions, do not admit sisters to the public gospel preaching ministry on par with brethren, we as a Conference designate the act of setting aside sisters to missionary work 'a commissioning' rather than 'an ordination.'[26]

The lack of any explanation regarding the appeal to 'clearly conceived scriptural convictions' suggests that presupposed yet unarticulated convictions underlay the shift despite the longstanding practice. In fact, this shift in the practice of ordaining women finds its roots in a much earlier yet far-reaching modification of Mennonite Brethren polity.

For the sixty years following their immigration to the United States, the traditional pattern of multiple lay ministry provided a stable church governance model for Mennonite Brethren congregations. The continuing process of acculturation, however, finally resulted in the transition from the use of German to English in worship services during the 1930s in the United States, which contributed directly to a growing number of churches hiring full-time, salaried, and theologically trained pastors.[27] Accompanying this shift was the uncritical adoption of a representative council model of governance, which replaced a leadership structure comprised of all lay ministers or elders. Historian John A. Toews observes,

> From available church and conference records it appears that the question of the 'one pastor system' was never discussed in principle within the context of New Testament teaching nor in the light of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. The arguments for and against the new system are virtually all of a pragmatic nature.[28]

This change essentially 'just happened,' thus reflecting an unconscious convictional shift that worked itself out in a changing practice.[29]

As more and more churches began adopting the single professional pastor model, conference leadership became increasingly alarmed. At the

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[25] *Year Book of the 47th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1957), p. 106. See also Doug Heidebrecht, 'Mennonite Brethren Ordination of Women, 1899-1958,' *Mennonite Historian* 34, no. 4 (December 2008): p. 1-2, 8-9. At least 131 women were ordained between 1899 and 1958.

[26] *Ibid*. See also Minutes, General Conference Committee of the Reference and Counsel, 1955, p. 13.

[27] Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 306.

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] See Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century,' p. 203.

1948 General Conference convention, the Committee of Reference and Counsel raised concerns about 'the various spiritually disintegrating influences,' which were beginning to infiltrate the conference.[30] They went so far as to ask churches 'to consider that we do not call teachers of the Word from the churches outside of our conference fellowship because they frequently hold teachings which we as a Mennonite Brethren conference cannot endorse.'[31]

In response to these influences, the Committee encouraged churches to regulate the ordination and appointment of ministers more carefully by ensuring that leaders receive 'their training in our own conference and have proven themselves for a period of several years as true and faithful to the doctrine and practice of the Mennonite Brethren Church.'[32] These concerns motivated convention delegates to elect a commission to study the possibility of establishing a Mennonite Brethren seminary to train their own church leaders.[33]

Three years later, at the 1951 General Conference convention, the Committee of Reference and Counsel continued to highlight two related concerns. First, church leaders were no longer being 'chosen from within the church, trained and matured under the influence and leadership of the Elders of the church…[and] thoroughly indoctrinated with all Scriptural principles of belief and practice.'[34] The Committee argued that the displacement of a gradual training process within the church by theological instruction at educational institutions had not only weakened church leadership but threatened doctrinal unity.[35] Second, the influence of individualism had undermined the interdependence of churches and the principle of 'an interrelated brotherhood' where 'the individual remains subordinate to the larger body.'[36] While they acknowledged that 'each local church is independent in the administration of its internal affairs,' they also appealed to churches to 'recognize resolutions and decisions of the Conference as morally binding.'[37]

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[30] *Year Book of the 44th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1948), p. 106.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 106-107. If leaders were appointed from outside the Mennonite Brethren conference, their ordination by another denomination was not recognized.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[34] *Yearbook of the 45th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1951), p. 125.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 126-127.

[36] *Ibid*, p. 127.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 129-130.

In response to these concerns, the Committee also proposed guidelines for the appointment of church leaders that reflected a gradual process of discernment and calling within the context of the local church.[38] Ordination was to be understood as an act of confirmation carried out only after candidates had proven themselves to be faithful in the church.[39] Leaders who 'have come from other circles or schools' may not be considered for ordination unless they have served faithfully for several years and passed an examination demonstrating their 'loyalty to the M.B. Church in faith, doctrine, and church policy.'[40] Delegates at the 1951 convention, however, asked for more time before approving these particular recommendations.

In light of the proposed stipulations and the need to still legitimize leaders who did not meet the criteria for ordination, a growing divergence in practice emerged within local churches. This prompted the Pacific District to ask for clarification at the next General Conference convention in 1954 regarding the 'distinction between licensing or commissioning and ordination.'[41] They also inquired whether 'it wouldn't be better that women missionaries be commissioned and not ordained.'[42] The emergence of this last question without explanation points to an unarticulated perception that the current practice of ordaining women was somehow incongruous with the development of two levels of recognition. Perhaps a related question by the Southern District, 'How much authority does a licensed minister have?' highlights the underlying dissonance.[43]

The Board of Reference and Counsel responded to these questions in 1957 by defining the category of licensing for 'a specific Christian work project and for a specified period of time' where people did not have the 'qualifications prerequisite to ordination.'[44] While licensing still authorized a person 'to preach the Gospel, baptize believers, admit members, administer the Lord's Supper and Feet Washing, marry couples and officiate funerals,' the shift to commissioning women was based explicitly on the rationale that women were prohibited from public preaching.[45] The

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 134-143.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 135.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 136, 139.
[41] *Yearbook of the 46th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), p. 6. See also *Year Book of the 45th Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (1954), p. 97; and Minutes, Pacific District Reference and Counsel Meeting, September 14, 1954, p. 1. Licensing would reflect government legitimization while commissioning would represent recognition by the church.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Yearbook of the 46th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America*, p. 7.
[44] *Year Book of the 47th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1957), p. 106, 107.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

relationship between licensing and commissioning appears ambiguous, although both are distinct from ordination. Ironically, the appeal to 'clearly conceived scriptural convictions' as the basis for limiting women from preaching is made nowhere else in relation to the pragmatic creation of a distinction between ordination and licensing or commissioning.[46]

This shift in practice regarding the ordination of women calls for further explanation. First, the adoption of the 'single pastor' model of church governance by Mennonite Brethren beginning in the 1930s represents the consequences of acculturation within an American context. Canadian Mennonite Brethren would not adopt the pastoral system until the 1950s and 1960s, due to the large influx of Mennonite immigrants from Russia during the 1920s, which set back the acculturation process by reinforcing ethnic segregation and cultural isolation. Nevertheless, Richard Kyle observes that 'the history of the Mennonite Brethren in North America is one of progressive acceptance of cultural traits from the wider society on one hand, and a largely unsuccessful resistance to this acculturation on the other.'[47] This tension underlies the polity changes taking place during the mid-twentieth century.

The Mennonite Brethren transition from an agrarian culture defined by clear ethnic boundaries to an urban industrial setting brought with it increasing educational levels and a growing professionalization. For example, while 9% of all Mennonites in Canada lived in urban settings in 1941, by 1961 this had grown to almost 35%, with Mennonite Brethren becoming urbanized at a greater rate than all other Mennonite groups.[48] These changes thrust Mennonite Brethren into modernity with its strong individualism, hierarchical conception of leadership, and emphasis on pragmatic solutions.[49] As the sense of a collective identity diminished, authority within the church shifted from a recognized group of leaders in a community to the specialized position of the pastor, whose authority was supported by educational credentials. The functional character of the representative church council model coupled with the hiring of pastors from outside the church membership, whose tenures were often brief, further challenged the traditional Mennonite Brethren understanding of

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[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century,' p. 194.

[48] See See Leo Driedger, 'Post-War Canadian Mennonites: From Rural to Urban Dominance,' *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988): p. 75; Leo Driedger, 'From Martyrs to Muppies: The Mennonite Urban Professional Revolution,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57.3 (1993): p. 308; and Leo Driedger & J. Howard Kauffman, 'Urbanization of Mennonites: Canadian and American Comparisons,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56 (1982): p. 269-290.

[49] Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 226, 237.

authority within the church.[50] As Delbert Wiens concluded, 'We begin with the idea of a shared ministry and the priesthood of all believers, but our model leads us to force our leaders into functioning as foremen and as bosses.'[51]

At the 1958 Mennonite Brethren study conference, papers were presented on the biblical teaching of both the nature and governance of the church.[52] Waldo Hiebert warned that the Mennonite Brethren embrace of the pastoral system highlighted a 'great lack of understanding as to what the brotherhood actually is and what its collective responsibilities are.'[53] Hiebert cautioned about the danger of congregations leaning too heavily upon pastors, rather than 'sensing the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and listening to the decision of the brotherhood as a body.'[54] However, the concern of conference leaders, as J.B. Toews notes, 'passed as a mere echo in the whirlwind of change.'[55]

Ordination now became one means by which the authority of leaders was recognized. The earlier practice of ordaining a large group of leaders within the local church reflected a corporate discernment based on long-term relationships and the recognition of the need for a diversity of gifts within the community. The ordination of women for foreign missions within this context acknowledged their contribution as members called by God to serve on behalf of the church. However, it seems that when ordination became the means of acknowledging a position of authority, coupled with the option of a secondary category of recognition, women's ordination was no longer justifiable.

A second observation is that the acculturation process experienced by Mennonite Brethren opened the door that provided the theological justification for rescinding women's ordination. As Mennonite Brethren's cultural cohesiveness dissolved during the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, they indiscriminately embraced fundamentalism. According to George Marsden, the broad features of fundamentalism include opposition to liberal theologies and secular culture, a militant defence of the Bible's inerrancy and key doctrinal beliefs, the demand for strict behavioural

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[51] Delbert Wiens, 'Incarnation and Ideal: The Story of a Truth Becoming Heresy,' in *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History*, ed. Paul Toews (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies/Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1977), p. 40.
[52] See Waldo D. Hiebert, 'The Scriptural Definition of the Nature of the Church,' (paper presented at the MB Study Conference, Denver, July 1958); and B.J. Braun, 'The Scriptural Teaching on Organization and Government of the Local Church' (paper presented at the MB Study Conference, Denver, July 1958).
[53] Hiebert, 'The Scriptural Definition of the Nature of the Church,' p. 8.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[55] Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 237.

standards, and the promotion of aggressive evangelism strategies.[56] Fundamentalism appealed to these relatively new Mennonite Brethren immigrants because it reinforced their perception that the broader culture was suspect and emphasized shared beliefs such as the authority of Scripture, separation from the world, and a legalistic ethic.[57] The debate between fundamentalism and modernism became convenient expressions for the differences between 'cultural conservatives and progressives, between rural and urban Mennonites, between isolation and accommodation, between those opposing and those promoting higher education, between doctrinal simplicity and theological sophistication, between denominational separatism and ecumenicity.'[58] Interestingly, Canadian Mennonite Brethren did not experience the influence of fundamentalism in the same way, because, again, the large number of recent arrivals from Russia came both with a stronger sense of Mennonite identity and an immigrant mentality that set back the acculturation process.[59]

When Mennonite Brethren could no longer sustain a cultural distance with boundaries maintained by a distinctive language and ethnic seclusion, they found affinity with American fundamentalism 'without any provision for examining the emphases and assertions' of this movement.[60] Since Mennonite Brethren lacked a strong doctrinal identification, they were very susceptible to outside theological influences.[61] While their 'non-creedal orientation...gave them the liberty to fellowship with people from other evangelical bodies whom they considered to be 'true believers,'' this openness also carried inherent dangers.[62] Their 'implicit faith' was sufficient as long as it existed 'in the context of a homogeneous culture with a prescribed lifestyle' that maintained a shared understanding of faith and practice.[63] In the midst of this cultural transition, Mennonite Brethren made little effort to develop a theology that was unique to their own spiritual legacy.[64]

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[56] George M. Marsden, 'Defining American Fundamentalism,' *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within: A Response from Without*, ed. Norman J. Cohen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 22-26.

[57] Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century,' p. 197.

[58] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p. 85.

[59] Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century,' p. 201.

[60] J.B. Toews, 'The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology,' *Direction* 10, no. 3 (1981): p. 22. See also Paul Toews, 'Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America,' *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988): p. 43.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[62] Toews, 'The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology,' p. 21.

[63] See Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 180.

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

The growing expectation among Mennonite Brethren for theologically trained leaders, who were educated primarily in conservative schools, provided a channel for introducing fundamentalist thinking into churches. Even the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, established in 1955, was dominated by fundamentalist influences.[65] Pastors and teachers replicated a rigid concept of inerrancy and a literalistic hermeneutic, which assumed that the restrictive passages regarding women represented 'transcultural principles for all times and places' and any challenges to the 'order of creation' constituted a denial of biblical authority.[66] For example, D. Edmond Hiebert, New Testament scholar at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, reasoned in his 1957 commentary on 1 Timothy that a woman could not 'assume the office of a public teacher in the congregation' for this official position of 'superiority and authority' was 'inconsistent with her divinely assigned position of subordination to the man.'[67]

The unstated 'scriptural convictions' underlying the General Conference decision to rescind women's ordination represented fundamentalist assumptions about the place of women within the church that were mirrored by Mennonite Brethren leaders. Questions regarding ordination emerged in light of shifting models of church polity, which further reflected a pervasive process of acculturation at a time when fundamentalism held sway within conservative churches in America. This convergence reveals an unarticulated consensus among Mennonite Brethren that failed to reflect any intentional process of communal discernment, although it would eventually be challenged when the women's rights movement emerged during the early 1960s.

Defining Mennonite Brethren Convictions – 1981

The implications of the far reaching effects of the 1960s feminist movement for Mennonite Brethren were finally addressed by the General Conference at their 1981 convention in a formal resolution. This followed a decade of debate at both provincial, district, and national conference levels regarding the role of women in the church. Even though the resolution expressed caution about the influence of the feminist movement on the church, it also affirmed the participation of women in local church and conference ministries.[68] However, the resolution maintained that since the

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[65] Kyle, 'North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid Century,' p. 202.

[66] Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986), p. 142.

[67] D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), p. 60.

[68] 'Resolution on Women in Ministry,' *Yearbook: 55th Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (August 7-11, 1981): p. 46-47.

restrictive New Testament passages were understood to be still relevant, Mennonite Brethren should not 'ordain women to pastoral leadership.'[69]

This particular restriction would prove to be rather vague in the years to come because it was unclear whether the prohibition was intended to restrict women from ordination, or pastoral ministry, or even church leadership. David Ewert, who wrote the resolution on behalf of the Board of Reference and Counsel, had in mind the single pastor model of church governance, where ordination recognized the authority of pastors as leaders of the church. The resolution was based on Ewert's study paper, 'The "Place" of the Woman in the Church,' which he presented at the 1980 General Conference study conference.[70] In this paper Ewert found it difficult to 'harmonize the freedom passages with the restriction passages,' and so, while he affirmed women's complete freedom to use their gifts, he concluded that this freedom must be qualified 'in light of the creation order and the strong [biblical] emphasis…on man's headship.'[71] Ewert drew the line in Mennonite Brethren practice by limiting pastoral leadership in the congregation to men as well as restricting women from ordination for pastoral ministry.[72]

Karen Neufeld, an associate professor at Tabor College, in her response observed how Ewert's review of the role of women in the New Testament moved her so convincingly in 'the direction of women's full participation in the work of the church,' that she was totally unprepared for his conclusion.[73] Neufeld critiqued Ewert for failing to provide a thorough explanation of the significance of the order of creation or the headship of men, and furthermore, aptly exposed Ewert's unarticulated leadership model underlying his restriction of women whereby he equated pastoral ministry with authority leadership.[74] She asked 'since when have we believed in an authority leadership as the ideal or only model for our pastors?'[75] Neufeld argued that 'the issue of women's role in the church stands at the heart of what we believe the church to be and what we believe relationships to be among believers.'[76] Neufeld's critique reveals a swirling

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[70] David Ewert, 'The 'Place' of the Woman in the Church' (paper presented at 'Current Issues in Church Leadership,' Clearbrook, B.C., May, 1980), p. 1-22, CMBS (Winnipeg), Papers and Essays, Box 6, Folder N, No. 6.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 20, 21.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[73] Karen Berg Neufeld, 'Response To: 'The 'Place' of the Woman in the Church'' (paper presented at 'Current Issues in Church Leadership,' Clearbrook, B.C., May, 1980), p. 1, CMBS (Winnipeg), Papers and Essays, Box 6, Folder N, No. 6.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 1-3.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

undercurrent that had permeated Mennonite Brethren convictions regarding the practice of church leadership.

At the same 1980 study conference, two other papers addressed questions of leadership styles and ordination in Mennonite Brethren churches. John E. Toews, professor of New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, set the background for his examination of biblical leadership styles by surveying the transition among Mennonite Brethren from a multiple lay ministry model to a single pastor model, which centralized authority in one person that often resulted in a hierarchical leadership structure.[77] Toews noted that during the 1960s and 1970s, reactions against hierarchical authority led to a democratic view of leadership where authority was located with each individual.[78] He observed that evangelicals were now searching for responsible authoritative leadership structures rooted in legitimate power.[79]

Toews explicitly defined leadership as 'a function of authority' involving the 'interpretation and exercise of power'; however, the character of authority must reflect the nature of the community being led.[80] Toews argued for a shared servant model of leadership where the authority of leadership was lodged in the act of ministering, not in an office or position of leadership.[81] In his response, Herb Neufeld, pastor of Willingdon Church in Vancouver, proposed establishing a single Board of Elders, which was consistent with a multiple leadership model yet had the authority to lead the church.[82]

In a third paper presented at the 1980 study conference, Victor Adrian, Executive Secretary of the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services, suggested that over time the practice of ordination had become limited to the recognition of full-time professional pastors, which had created a tension between the concept of the priesthood of all believers and an almost sacramental view of leadership.[83] The Board of Reference and Counsel addressed the growing confusion about the meaning of

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[77] John E. Toews, 'Leadership Styles for Mennonite Brethren Churches' (paper presented at 'Current Issues in Church Leadership,' Clearbrook, B.C., May, 1980), p. 1-4, CMBS (Winnipeg), Papers and Essays, Box 6, Folder N, No. 6.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 4, 27, 28.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 29, 31.

[82] Herb Neufeld, 'Response Paper: 'Leadership Styles for the Mennonite Brethren Church'' (paper presented at 'Current Issues in Church Leadership,' Clearbrook, B.C., May, 1980), p. 5, CMBS (Winnipeg), Papers and Essays, Box 6, Folder N, No. 6.

[83] Victor Adrian, 'The Call and Ordination to the Ministry' (paper presented at 'Current Issues in Church Leadership,' Clearbrook, B.C., May, 1980), p. 5, CMBS (Winnipeg), Papers and Essays, Box 6, Folder N, No. 2.

ordination through a resolution at the 1981 General Conference convention.[84] The resolution defined ordination as an act by which people were 'authorized to serve in the church's name.'[85] The resolution made a clear distinction between ordination (the affirmation of 'those called by God for the ministry of the gospel'), commissioning (affirmation for 'a specific service for a period of time') and licensing (the authorization to 'perform functions for which state approval is required').[86] The resolution specifically stated that 'those seeking ordination or recognition of ordination, shall be men.'[87]

The convergence of questions about church polity, ordination, and women in leadership was now quite explicit, although the significance of the correlation was not acknowledged at the time. Several observations are again in order. First, Mennonite Brethren, like many evangelicals at the time, became preoccupied with questions about the nature of leadership and tended to neglect a similar level of engagement with ecclesiology. By the 1980s Mennonite Brethren within Canada and the United States had been fully acculturated and so embodied the prevailing values and attitudes exemplified by evangelicals within North American society. The equation of leadership with authority reflected the influence of the Church Growth Movement, which promoted a highly centralized, even autocratic, leadership model that sought functional effectiveness with one goal in mind; the growth of the church.[88] While Mennonite Brethren resonated strongly with this evangelistic focus, a growing disillusionment with denominational loyalty along with an increasing identification with mainstream evangelicalism did not provide the necessary resources that would enable them to assess the incongruity of an authoritative leadership model in light of their earlier understanding of the nature of the church.

This concern with the authority of leadership positions in the church provides a backdrop to the formation of the 1981 resolution and the attempt to apply the biblical prohibition restricting women's authority in 1 Timothy to current church practice. This resolution reflected David Ewert's mediating hermeneutical strategy, which sought to preserve the inherent tension he saw in the presence of both affirming and restricting texts in the New Testament. However, his hermeneutical strategy also sought to accomplish another agenda; that of mediating between two emerging

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[84] 'Resolution on Ordination,' *55th Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (August 7-11, 1981), p. 5-11.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[88] See Toews, 'The Church Growth Theory and Mennonite Brethren Polity,' p. 109.

groups among Mennonite Brethren who held divergent views regarding the role of women in the church. The authority of the ordained pastoral position became the balance point between these two positions.

A second related observation is that Mennonite Brethren church polity was again entering into another transitional period where within the next decade the majority of congregations would adopt an elder governance model. Herb Neufeld promoted the elder model as the biblical leadership structure, whilst John E. Toews continued to argue that 'since one's theology of church defines one's theology of church leadership, the study of biblical leadership must always start with the theology of the church.'[89] This changing leadership structure carried implications for how the 1981 Mennonite Brethren resolution would be interpreted, which were not anticipated when the resolution was initially drafted. As authority became more and more associated with the elder board rather than with pastoral positions, some churches began restricting women from participating in church leadership structures, although they would still hire women as associate pastors.

The adoption of the eldership model harkened back to the multiple lay ministry model used by Mennonite Brethren churches for their first ninety years. J.B. Toews labelled this early leadership structure a 'modified presbyterian polity' because, although the church was led by a group of elders, there was also 'strong congregational involvement in deliberations and decision-making.'[90] This robust ecclesiological engagement was now often missing in the new eldership model and authority became the exclusive domain of a group of male elders to the exclusion of both the gathered congregation and women in the church.

Ironically, this emphasis on the authority of the elder board within a congregation to lead the church was not extended to the conference level. Even though the Board of Reference and Counsel sought to move the denomination toward greater affirmation for women in ministry, individual churches resisted their leadership. As the debate among Mennonite Brethren intensified toward the end of the 1980s, parallel to the increasing acceptance of the elder model, the lack of consensus among churches regarding women in leadership did not translate into a willingness to follow

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[89] See Herb Neufeld, 'The Theology and Practice Model of Eldership in Church Governments' (a paper presented to the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel, December 1, 1988), p. 14; and John E. Toews, 'Response to Herb Neufeld Paper on Eldership,' (a paper presented to the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel, November 27, 1989), p. 1. See also Bruce L. Guenther and Doug Heidebrecht, 'The Elusive Biblical Model of Leadership,' *Direction* 28, no. 2 (Fall 1999): p. 153-165.

[90] Toews, 'The Church Growth Theory and Mennonite Brethren Polity,' p. 106.

the Board's direction. While there remained some recognition of the need for unity on this issue, the healthy engagement skills required for this kind of conversation were no longer being nurtured.

Finally, the restriction of women from being ordained carries with it a level of ambiguity that makes it difficult to interpret. In the resolution regarding women in ministry, ordination is linked with 'pastoral leadership,' presumably a reference to the position of a pastor.[91] However, in the resolution regarding ordination approved at the same convention, ordination is linked with 'those called by God for the ministry of the gospel.'[92] It is unclear whether this refers to the ministry of preaching or evangelism, or perhaps something else. While the imprecision of language lends itself to a variety of interpretations, more poignantly it reveals an unexamined ecclesiology that has failed to grapple with the nature of the Spirit's gifting in the church.

Conclusion

This brief glimpse at three moments when North American Mennonite Brethren churches addressed the issue of women in church leadership highlights how these conversations must be understood as part of the attempt by Mennonite Brethren to contextualize their leadership practices in the midst of changing circumstances. The convergence of these conversations about women in leadership with shifting church polity structures and questions regarding the practice of ordination reveal a susceptibility to outside theological influences, particularly as a result of acculturation. Once the ethnic boundaries separating Mennonite Brethren from the wider culture dissolve, their intuitive theology, even though it is coupled with a vigorous biblicism, is unable to provide a robust theological identity. This is clearly evident in regards to the relationship of Mennonite Brethren ecclesiological convictions and their practice of church leadership. Attempts to address the issue of women in church leadership are caught within this churning whirlpool.

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[91] 'Resolution on Women in Ministry,' p. 47.
[92] 'Resolution on Ordination,' p. 6.

Prejudice as Enactment of Ideology:
A Case Study of the Latvian-Russian Relationship

Peter Zvagulis

Abstract

Hate-speech as a socially embodied form of hate ideology is in great part responsible for maintaining ethnic tension between the Latvian and Russian communities of Latvia. Hate-speech is portrayed as a collective phenomenon which can be countered only on the community level. The social processes involved are analysed with the help of René Girard's mimetic theory. The vicious cycle of mutual recriminations may be broken by changing people's attitudes from hate to the respect of humanity of the other. It is suggested that Just Peacemaking Theory with its Transforming Initiatives may be applicable. A community of disciples may become a model of positive relationships breaking the vicious cycle. To avoid peacemaking itself becoming an ideology imposing theoretical constructs on life's narrative, a local historical precedent, the 18th century missionary initiative by the Moravian Brethren, is considered, in order to provide inspirational insights for connecting the Gospel narrative with the narrative of present-day Latvia.

Key Words: Hate Speech; Mimetic Theory; René Girard; Latvia; Russians; Just Peacemaking Theory; Moravian Brethren

Introduction

The object of my research is hate-speech in Latvia's print press and the potential Christian contribution in reducing or eliminating it from public discourse. Hate-speech is directly related to prejudice and to hate ideology. While all ideologies try to impose their theoretical presuppositions on people and societies which are more complex than they possibly can describe, hate ideology is a particularly coercive and vicious form of it. Hate ideology is aimed against specific groups of people and its ultimate implicit logic is a genocidal one, even when no violence is suggested. Its implied main message is that the world would be a much better place without a specific group of people. Hate-speech is the socially-embodied form of this ideology; it is the hate message itself.

Hate speech originates in a prejudiced thinking and it is also the communicative impulse and embodied unit of prejudiced ideas organised into an ideological system. Prejudice, according to Gordon Allport, is "a pattern of hostility in interpersonal relations which is directed against an entire group, or against its individual members" because they are part of

this group.[1] It creates an attitude of favour or disfavour based on over-generalised beliefs.[2] Some over-generalisations may be difficult to counter at the level of abstract debate. However a narrative confronting such beliefs with specific historical and social context is able to fully expose their absurdity.

Therefore I will have a narrative in the beginning of my report and I will have a narrative in its concluding part. I will explore prejudice as a primarily corporate phenomenon. I will investigate the polarised visions and the conflict situation that this phenomenon creates. I will also examine two different approaches to resolving this conflict situation. One, which views the world from the perspective of power structures, regards the use of overwhelming force as justified if the result is believed to be a lasting peace and social stability. This approach seeks either to defend the structure or destroy the competing one. The other, which views the world from the perspective of the Suffering Servant, tries to change the inner relationships from a hostile attitude to a loving one without violently challenging the structures. It does it by communal witness from the margins.

In the Latvian context, the corporate prejudice is rooted in two different visions of history of the Latvian and Russian communities of the country and constitutes a core of hostile public discourse. It will be important to characterise these visions in what follows. The two ways of dealing with conflict situations also have examples in Latvian history. One has produced destructive results and hatred, the other has resulted in spiritual awakening and improved relationships.

As I was preparing this article and thinking about prejudice as enactment of ideology, my eyes stopped on a book written by a teenage girl almost seventy years ago *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank. I read again and again her very sharp and surprisingly mature observations about the behaviour of people in a situation where prejudice had taken the form of official government policies and been legitimised by decrees. I want to quote one short passage from the first chapters which describes the time when the Frank family, after being summoned by the SS, for deportation, were escaping and heading toward a secret hiding place in Amsterdam.

> So we walked in the pouring rain, Daddy, Mommy, and I, each with school satchel and shopping bag filled to the brim with all

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[1] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954), 12.

[2] *Ibid*. 13.

> kinds of things thrown together anyhow. We got sympathetic looks from people on their way to work. You could see by their faces how sorry they were they could not offer us a lift; the gaudy yellow star spoke for itself.[3]

I think this testimony tells it all. It tells about prejudice as the enactment of ideology perhaps in a deeper way than is possible by talking about it purely theoretically. This authentic account helps me today to put current developments into a much clearer historical and moral perspective. The passage just quoted   offers a glimpse of what happens when prejudice through indoctrination and coercion gives birth to corporate evil imposing its rules on society. The meaning of good and bad is then subverted. Doing evil becomes good, and doing good becomes at least questionable. In extreme cases, as in Nazi Germany, corporate evil elevates prejudice to the level of official politics and legislation. Prejudice is forced even upon those who do not share it. They become passive and do not oppose the evil. In the short testimony that I have just quoted the yellow star – the sign that the Frank family was Jewish - prevented people from being kind and from helping them, even if in their hearts they would have wished to do so. They all realised that doing good deeds would be considered bad, anti-social and punishable behaviour. This coercive power of prejudice is observable also in other contexts where its embodied form - hate-speech – is tolerated as a legitimate part of public discourse.

This article is about Latvian-Russian relations in Latvia and the role of the print press as an enactment of two hate ideologies. Even though the situation is very far from the situation which the Frank family faced in Nazi-occupied Holland, it has some common characteristics. One such characteristic is the dehumanising vision of people belonging to another ethno-linguistic group. Another is the coercive power which this collective vision exercises on the behaviour of communities and individuals.

This prejudiced vision has quite direct links to the events of World War Two and the time surrounding it (or rather to the two mythologised accounts of this historical period). This prejudiced vision also means labelling people, attaching "yellow stars" to them in our collective mind. The problem is that people do this without noticing it. They do not notice it because they are mesmerised by the self-hypnosis of a prejudiced vision and by the mantra of hate-speech. The endless repetition of hate message transforms prejudice into a vicious corporate practice, which serves as a continuing re-enactment of hate ideology. "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" then applies to such victims of illusions

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[3] Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 16.

who become perpetrators simply out of a desire to be good members of their own society.

In exploring such a complex phenomenon as embodiment of corporate prejudice (hate-speech) it is very helpful to be able to build on the knowledge accumulated by other researchers. Luckily I can stand on the shoulders of many giants, one of them being René Girard. His mimetic theory with its Scapegoat Mechanism provides many meaningful insights into the role of reciprocity in conflict situations and into the process of scapegoating by which a group tries to restore unity while focusing on illusory causes and avoiding real problems.

In its essence hate-speech is scapegoating. It is present in any situation which involves ethnic or religious resentment and group prejudice. We could look at ethnic or other forms of group prejudice in Northern Ireland, Latvia, Russia, Bulgaria or many other places in Europe and we would find the same pattern. The other group is always at fault.

If we apply Girard's hermeneutics to political situations involving ethnic tension, as it is in the case of Latvia, we can see that scapegoating happens as a reaction to a strong increase of collective frustration. When social tension becomes intolerable it threatens to make human relationships within a given society something similar to Hobbes' "war of all against all," thus disrupting the social fabric of society.[4] Since the coherence of collective identity is disrupted, the identity of every member of this society is endangered. If the legitimate political power is unable to restore allegiance to the old collective identity, a search for other means is triggered. It is a search for a scapegoat.

To interpret further development of the process we need to look at case studies where it has gone to the very end of its tragic and destructive logic – genocide. The Weimar Republic of the 1920s and 1930s, with the subsequent rise of the Nazis to power, is a classic example of such a development. In such a situation of high emotional mobility, an opportunistic leader pointing to a scapegoat as the alleged "cause" of the frustration is welcomed as a "saviour." As soon as the common "enemy" is identified and the collective "defense" activities take place, the emotional unity of society is restored. To those involved it may appear as a

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[4] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 1 'Of State of Men without Civil Society,' (http://www.marxists.org/reference/ subject/philosophy/works/en/decive1.htm, accessed 19 November 2010); René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp.92-93; R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp.104-105. Girard's own term for intra-communal hostility is *sacrificial crisis*.

miraculous cure and as a confirmation of the inerrancy of the "saviour." To an outside observer it looks like an epidemic of collective madness.

The blueprint of this development is detectable in all instances where prejudice-based ideology has been allowed to subvert society's moral values and become a dominant state policy leading to collective violence. It is important to emphasise that none of the tragic events were as spontaneous as they may have appeared to outside observers. There was always a dissemination of the prejudiced ideas and indoctrination happening before each of the mass events. It is because no collective violence can happen without being preceded by hate-speech.

Hate-speech as pseudo-cure sets the society on a wrong course. The real causes of frustration, such as corporate greed, social injustice, discrimination, corruption or bureaucratic inefficiency are not addressed. All collective efforts are mobilised against an imaginary enemy and toward illusory goals. After a while the unsolved problem returns in an aggravated form and a new scapegoat is needed. The other vice of the scapegoat process is that it establishes false and violent patterns of social regulations in society. It may seem that all we would need to avoid such a scenario is our individual intellectual awareness of the scapegoating process. However, while individual awareness is indeed helpful, it is not sufficient as a preventive measure. Scapegoating is a collective phenomenon and it is rooted in our unconscious. It invites manipulation and can be countered only collectively.[5]

From the perspective of René Girard's mimetic theory such an intensely polarised conflict situation is destructive because it results in a tunnel-like vision between the adversaries. Both of them become the *monstrous doubles* because they need to be equally violent to sustain the power parity. They become each others' model. Thus the conflict situation is locked in a vicious cycle. The intense negative emotional exchange between the rivals guarantees the continuation of their binary world vision. Only introduction of a new positive model and imitation of it by at least one adversary could break the vicious cycle. Usually it is impossible because either there is no such positive model or because during an intense struggle where all that matters is attack and defence, it is very difficult to divert the attention of combatants from the violent rivalry. It would be a difficult task on a personal level; it is even more difficult on a corporate level.

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[5] I am indebted to Dr Parush Parushev for this insight.

Yet Girard thinks that it is possible to break out of the vicious cycle of the monstrous doubles by adopting Christ's non-polarised perspective on the conflict and by imitating his virtuous model instead of the vicious model of the monstrous double. In other words it means joining Jesus' narrative today. Girard seems less certain about the specific tactics of doing so, especially on the corporate level. Fortunately we have a local Latvian historic precedent for such an initiative to which we may apply the Girardian hypothesis. Before discussing this precedent, though, I want to look at the current Latvian context and the two polarised perspectives which are at the root of the ethno-linguistic tension.

The ethnic polarisation in Latvia and its impact on the Church

The ethnic tension between Latvians and Russians bears the characteristics of what many conflict researchers would call deep-rooted conflict.[6] It means that it is based on a stereotyped vision (or, as Allport would say, an over-generalisation) of the other group; a vision which is derived from resentment about the perceived injustices suffered from the other group in the past. This in turn is viewed as a proof of the supposed inherent evilness of the character of the other group and serves as an excuse for hating them today. Both groups feel that it is the fault of the other group that they are hated.

While only the extremists and radically-minded newspaper journalists articulate the hatred openly, many people, including moderates, feel that it would be much better if the other group would simply disappear. Then they would be able to live in a homogeneous society. The radicals would have their ideal "pure" society. The moderates would not feel uncomfortable about being perceived by their own group as too friendly with people from the other group and would not have to run the risk of being labelled as traitors.

Christian communities in the country seem not to be part of the problem itself, although they seem to have accepted the "normality" of hate-speech in secular life and they appear not to see it as a challenge and a sufficient reason for witness. To me it has certain situational similarities with the erroneous convictions of the Corinthians that Rollin Grams analysed in his paper in this volume. I agree with his interpretation that the Corinthians were so used to the customs of the pagan environment that it did not occur to them that there was something wrong with such a way of

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[6] Vern Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict Can Open Paths To Reconciliation* (Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, Saint-Paul University, 2002).

life. Similarly in Latvia the unfriendly ethno-linguistic relations are perceived as almost part of the natural order.

In this sense the situation of Christian communities of Latvia has commonalities with the situation which Christian communities face in other strongly secularised countries. It is a question of how much the Church witnesses to the world versus how much the world comes into the Church. It is the question of how much the Church is transforming the world rather than conforming itself to the world. Of course, the context of the challenge is uniquely Latvian. Therefore, in order to suggest any transformative initiatives, the context first has to be properly understood.

Ethnic relations have a tradition of polarity in Latvia. Religion for most of the history has served as additional identification element of social and ethnic division. The names of the polarised groups have changed, with the exception of Latvians, but the blueprint of rivalry has remained.[7] For several centuries Latvians perceived the local Germans, descendants of the crusaders, as their oppressors and arch-enemies. During the Soviet rule a similar image was projected on Russians. After the renewal of independence of Latvia in 1991, the roles have changed. In the perception of radical local Russians the Latvians are now seen as oppressors and as their main enemies.

Meanwhile the Latvians continue to see the local Russians as their archetypal enemies, perceiving them as some sort of a "fifth column" of Latvia's big neighbour, Russia. In the context of their perception of history they continue to see Russians as a potential threat. This is a simplified account of what in reality is a very complex history of relations between several groups with different ethno-linguistic and religious identities. The current two dominating visions of history have their own undisputed truths, their own taboos and their own "holy grails."

The two visions of history

The implicit history-based meta-narratives are the "holy grails" containing the alleged ultimate "truth" about each group. They shape the attitudes toward current events and serve as a scale of reference for political and moral judgment. They represent the most radical convictions from which various ideological derivatives and confronting or accommodating policies can be deducted. They are perceived as self-sufficient truths which do not require proof.

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[7] This became the unifying name for the descendents of the ancient tribes of Courlanders (*Kursi*), Midlanders (*Vidzemnieki*) and Latgallians (*Latgali*).

The Latvian meta-narrative could perhaps be articulated as follows: "Throughout centuries the good and laborious Latvians have suffered under various oppressors of which Russians are the worst because they are wild looters, violent invaders, and treacherous and disorderly neighbours. In their heart they are Bolsheviks." If the Russian meta-narrative were to be articulated it would probably sound like this: "The Russians are the great warm-hearted nation whose mission is to save civilisation from the evil hordes of anti-Christ-like leaders; throughout history it has had to pay a high blood price for others. Latvians are ungrateful and cowardly traitors who do not appreciate being saved and historically have always served the evil forces. In their heart they are pro-Nazis." The two accounts of history are very different not only in the interpretation of events but also in their perception of the relevance of some long historical periods. There are periods in Latvian history, like the medieval and Enlightenment periods, which are important to Latvians, but are blank in the Russian vision of the history of Latvia.

The dating of the origins of Latvian ethnicity to 3000BC is important to most Latvians and completely unimportant to Russians.[8] Latvians see the centuries from the Fourth crusade to the 18th century as a history of their heroic struggle for freedom and of gradual loss of it to the German crusaders and their descendants. It is part of their self-perception as being eternal victims of aggression and oppression by the greater neighbouring nations. This period would be of no significance for the Russians except for the 1721 conquest of the Baltic lands by Russian tsar Peter the Great as a result of the Great Northern War. The adversaries of that war would be viewed by Latvians and by Russians from diametrically opposed perspectives. The epithets *invaders* and *liberators* each side would attach to a different belligerent party.

Latvians see the 18th century as an important milestone in the development of their ethnic self-awareness. The Brethren movement started in Livonia in 1729 with three Moravian Brethren missionaries from Herrnhut, led by Christian David. This movement is cherished as one of the most intimate and precious moments in Latvian cultural history. Latvians are aware that the first Latvian schools and the first indigenous literature are related to the Brethren movement. The religious significance of it is less often emphasised. Thus the missionary aspect of this movement, their respect for human dignity of the Latvian serfs, the story of unconditional love and brotherly attitude are partially lost.

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[8] The issue becomes emotional when objections are raised that this claim is based on linguistic hypothesis and that there is no archaeological evidence from that period of history supporting the claim.

It is well known that Count Zinzendorf was instrumental in opening the first Latvian teachers' seminary in Valmiera, but the story of him walking the Latvian countryside on foot and addressing Latvian serfs as brothers and sisters is nowadays hardly detectable. Even when mentioned, Zinzendorf's disregard for social barriers would often be incorrectly interpreted by secular historians as the influence of the ideas of Voltaire, which at that time came into fashion among the liberal aristocracy of Livonia.[9] This period and aspect of Latvian history would be mostly ignored by the Russians or looked up as irrelevant to their own identity.

While the lack of knowledge about the 18th and 19th century Latvian national awakening movement on the part of the Russians could cause certain resentment among the Latvians, most of the disagreements are about the periods which both communities give accounts for but with opposing views.[10] Most of the differences and heated debate pertain to the interpretation of the post-1991 period, the time of the 1945-1991 Soviet rule, World War Two and the time immediately preceding it. The years of the first independence of Latvia from 1918-1940 may be viewed slightly differently by both groups, but would not cause major disagreement; except for the period of Ulmanis' dictatorship (many Latvians would see it as a fulfilment of romantic nationalistic longings for a "pure" Latvian state).

The Latvian perception of history, even of the latest period of it, is a vision of a centuries-long continuous process where Latvians have to struggle for their independent identity between the surrounding powers of Russia and Germany. Latvians would see analogies and relations between distant historical events that others would not see the same way.[11] The Russian perception of Latvian history before 1991 would be much less detailed and often limited to the events of World War Two and the Soviet period. It is partly due to the fact that most of the current Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia, their parents or grand-parents settled in Latvia during the 1945-1991 Soviet rule.

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[9] Andrejs Johansons, *Latvijas Kultūras Vēsture: 1700-1800* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1975) 275. Johansons is one of the few authors who relate Zinzendorf's project in its true missionary context describing the impact of his *Imitatio Christi* approach.

[10] However because the Latvian perspective has the language and cultural heritage as their "holy grail," it would be impossible to understand the Latvian attitude without reviewing how those convictional concepts arise historically.

[11] *Latvija Divos Laikaposmos: 1918-1928 & 1991-2001* (Riga, 2001) 19-25. Latvians see common denominators in two very different historical periods: years following 1918 and 1991 as their struggle for equal rights among other nations, an important element of their collective identity. Another element, not visible to outsiders, is the deep collective emotional meaning of the traditional song festivals. The tradition dating back to 1873, the time of Latvian romantic nationalism, is perceived by Latvians as the carrier of their collective spiritual power.

During the communist regime information available about the pre-Soviet era was very scarce and selective. There were no incentives for Russians to learn about Latvian culture or history. On the contrary, inquiring about pre-Soviet Latvian culture and history could have been perceived as anti-Soviet and subversive activity. The prohibitive information policies of the Soviet regime contributed to emergence of various rumours which gradually developed into a new urban mythology. The Latvians had their urban mythology, the Russians had theirs. Latvians saw the Russians as the "red" (Bolsheviks) while Russians perceived the Latvians as "brown" (Nazis).

The Soviet Union has disappeared but the prejudiced attitude has remained. Russians are seen by the Latvians as the heirs of the Soviet communist troops which invaded Latvia before World War Two under a secret agreement of the Soviet regime with the Nazis. Russians are viewed as responsible for the Stalinist deportations of the Latvian intelligentsia to Siberia. Some Latvians would insist that there needs to be a new Nuremberg process in which the Russian communists would be tried by an international criminal court.

The Russians in turn see Latvians as the heirs of the Latvian Waffen SS units of the German army. They would also blame the Latvians for their participation in Holocaust. These over generalised attitudes can be detected in the headlines and the content of the Latvian and Russian language press of Latvia. They are abused by the populist politicians; these attitudes force people into certain behaviour – so as not to be labelled as a "friend of the Russians" or "friend of the Latvians" by their own groups. I now turn to some conclusions reached after a comprehensive content study of Latvia's newspapers in 2005.[12]

Newspapers contribute to ethnic tension

While there are a number of newspapers which present news in biased way, the researchers have established that two newspapers have become leaders in disseminating hostile messages. The two – *Chas* on the Russian side and *Latvijas Avize* on the Latvian side – have chosen to concentrate heavily on politicised ethnic relations. They are also leaders in negative and polarising attitudes toward the other ethnicity.[13] The other side is identified as a stereotypical collective personality in 54% of the articles reviewed. Ethnic relations are the main topic of 70% of articles in all surveyed periodicals

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[12] Sulmane, Ilze and Sergejs Kruks. *Manifestations of Intolerance and Promotion of Tolerance in Latvia.* (Riga: No publishing year, contains data up to 2005).
[13] *Ibid.*

and an important side-topic in a further 21% of articles.[14] Local issues are dominant in all of these nation-wide publications.

The identity of the ethnic groups is mostly determined by their ethno-linguistic origin, cultural particularities (social habits/traditions) and legal status (citizen, non-citizen). Analysis of ethnic relations has been found in 200 articles. 38% of them divide society into "us" versus "them;" 25% of articles identify the activities of ethnic groups either as positive or negative; 15% consider their own group to be victims of the other group; direct blaming of the other group 12%; "bad guys" versus "good guys" attitude in 10% of the articles.[15] Approval of racism is to be found in 22% of the articles and misinterpretation of racist incidents in 11%.[16] Incidents of xenophobic behaviour are often reported from the perspective of the given group (43% for all publications, 51% for Chas). The opinion of the other side is mostly either absent, misrepresented or under-represented.[17] Both Latvian and Russian newspapers directly attack the publications of the other side, publishing images of the most offensive pictures or headlines of the other side.

According to the research, Russian newspapers have a tendency to exaggerate events related to inter-ethnic issues, giving them a dramatic and heroic flavour. They are more active and perceive themselves as oppressed victims and as opposition. The journalists themselves are often the activists organising the protest events. For example, a single phone call from a Latvian who supports Russian protest action is depicted in official-sounding terms and the individual is called a "representative of the Latvian community."

Latvian newspapers tend to be negative and sarcastic about the protest events organised by Russian community and complain about the exaggerations in the Russian press. Some of the events are termed as "failed revolution," "adult hooligans," "show" (with a derogatory connotation). Russian newspapers in their articles and headlines often use threatening language. Terms such as "combat readiness," "Russians retreat but do not surrender," We have warned you! (Nashe delo predupreditj!)" - are typical for the headlines with polarised attitude.

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[14] *Ibid.*
[15] Sulmane and Kruks, *Manifestations of Intolerance*, 49.
[16] According to a Girardian interpretation of collective hostility and Allport's criteria of racial prejudice these figures could also be higher.
[17] *Ibid.* 3.

Some of the articles are purposely offensive and are aimed directly at provoking an angry and emotive reaction of the other side. Knowing that the linguistic element is at the core of the Latvian understanding of self identity, Russian newspapers publish derogatory remarks about the usefulness of the Latvian language often calling it a "stranger's language (*chuzhoy yazik*). This creates strong emotional response in the Latvian press and its readership. Some of the headlines read: "We shall not give in!" "Blasphemers!", "An attack that can start a wildfire." Accordingly the Russian press responds with headlines: "Craziness of the Brown shirts;" "Garda-yugend on march!" (association with Hitler-youth); "The quiet ethnocide."[18]

Summing this up, the press exaggerates the negative stereotyped vision of the other community and endlessly repeating the mantra of hate, which has become a "normal" part of the public discourse. In a certain sense the press is living in its own virtual reality which does not necessarily correspond to that of everyday life in the country. Yet at times it contributes to outbreaks of collective emotion.

Is there a way out?

Since just-war-like thinking is at the root of the hostile attitudes in Latvia, it seems obvious that such thinking may not serve peacemaking purposes. The only viable option is a non-violent attitude-changing approach. Historical resentment being at the core of disagreement, justice must be part of the process. However for reconciliation to be possible this has to be a redemptive and not punitive justice. The principles of such peacemaking approach can be found in the Christian Just Peacemaking Theory (JPT) of which Glen Stassen is the first and most prominent author.[19] The method of JPT consists of 'transforming initiatives' which in their deeper essence are all based on Matthew 5:22 and 39: not getting angry with another person, even an offender, and not responding to violence or insult in evil ways. It means reacting to the hate message in a surprising and non-conventional way, thus creating an opportunity of breaking the vicious cycle of negative reciprocity.

This theory based on the Sermon on the Mount has had many applications in various political contexts. I think its strength lies in its flexibility and its hermeneutical potential. By virtue of its not being a legalistic set of rules but rather a guide helping to link two narratives (the gospel narrative with the one of a particular peacemaking context), it

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[18] *Ibid.*, 3.2.1.
[19] Glen Stassen ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, second edition, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004).

escapes the danger of becoming an ideological system. It has inspired me to suggest the following transforming initiatives in the Latvian context; hopefully contributing to reduction or elimination of hate-speech from the local public discourse.

If there would be a Christian community willing to undertake the role of the peacemaker between the two communities in Latvia, these steps could be part of their witness to the society:

1. Not remaining silent and being the salt and light to the society. Exposing hate-speech for what it is: an affront to human dignity, disrespect for *Imago Dei*, scapegoating and avoidance of naming the real problems, an illusion and a lie.
2. Being pro-active rather than reactive in the sense of James 2:14 ("What good is your faith… if you don't show it in your actions?"). This may mean communal non-violent direct action.
3. Being a community of support for all peacemakers. Contrasting the hostile relationship in society with the loving relationship of the community of disciples.
4. Announcing a "freeze campaign." Renouncing the use of any disrespectful terms aimed at any person because of belonging to some group, which would mean introducing a new standard for public discourse.
5. Talking to the "enemy" side with the aim of agreeing on a common future. Overcoming the "us" versus "them" attitude and introducing one vision.
6. Taking a genuine interest in people's real needs: caring for human and social rights for all. Showing unconditional love and respect for the *Imago Dei* in each human being.
7. Having a humble attitude and understanding that every achievement is just temporary and must be continuously sustained and fought for. This is the Jubilee Year attitude: we are participating in God's plan here and now as much as it is in our power. As Glen Stassen summarises it: "Peace, just like war, must be waged!"

As good a guide as JPT is in connecting us to the Gospel narrative, without application to a specific cultural and political context it remains theoretical. Therefore a local narrative precedent of peacemaking would be a further help in interpreting the partially adjusted JPT initiatives in the narrative context of the current Latvian relationships, which is complicated not only because of the inter-ethnic hostility, but also because of the impact it has on Christian communities.

In the midst of this not very encouraging picture of the Latvian situation, there is also relatively good news. Despite all this venom being constantly thrown both ways by the press there have been no serious incidents of ethnically motivated violence in Latvia. The communities are not at war as it may appear from some of the newspaper headlines. Life follows its usual pattern. Nevertheless the relations are affected and tension is present. There is also more bad news: namely that this tension has become part of the everyday life and the hateful messages have become a "normal" part of the public discourse.

In this sense Christians are not much different from the other people. While they do not spread the ethnic hate messages, they also do not challenge them. Dualism between the Church life and the life in the society seems to be the accepted way among many denominations. There is also a sense that after five decades of atheist propaganda spread in Latvia by the Soviet regime the Church is not perceived as a serious player in the public opinion. In addition to that it appears that among the leaders of various Christian denominations the Constantinian model of Church and State relationship would be preferred to the witness from the margins. Thus the initiative and leadership is expected to come from the State. Yet this top-down imposition has proven to be ineffective and to a certain extent a counter-productive approach.

It seems quite obvious that the utilitarian self-serving thinking, which is the heart of the Constantinian model, is rather part of the problem than a solution. The Suffering Servant approach so ardently promoted by the early Anabaptists and later by the Moravian Brethren would be more adequate way of engaging with this deep-rooted conflict. The question arises: who can and will do it? Is there any chance for such a witness in contemporary Latvia?

While the first question can only be answered by Christian communities feeling and responding to the call, the answer to the second question is that I think there is a chance for attitude-transforming Christian witness in Latvia. At least there is a very vibrant local historical precedent of such a witness, which was done under very unfavourable circumstances, and which in a certain sense continues to bear fruit even today.

Historical precedent of communal witness from the margins

Throughout history the dominant method of settling conflict of interests on Latvian soil has been by force. Most of the time the Church has been close

to the power centre, and has thus preferred the Constantinian model. Despite this there is nevertheless an encouraging precedent of a powerful witness from the margins. Here I am returning to what in Latvia is called the Brethren or Herrnhutians.

When the Moravian Brethren missionaries came to Livonia in the middle of the eighteenth century the local world vision and the social order of oppression and mutual hatred was shattered in its very grounds as they brought an "upside down" vision of gospel truth to the Latvian serfs; a vision that brought new hope and light in the darkness. Herrnhutians taught literacy and craftsmanship to the Latvian peasants.[20] Such knowledge normally was the privilege of the Germans, therefore the educational work of the missionaries was perceived by the local German aristocracy as subversive activity. Many local communities had to gather in secret and their members nominally were still Lutherans.

This was an unprecedented experience for Latvians who were accustomed to think of Germans as violent crusaders, forcing Christianity upon people with the sword, or as cruel slave masters who do not consider Latvians to be human beings like themselves. This Constantinian model of Christianity had brought the local people to obedience, but it also had sown a deep-rooted hatred against oppressors and their religion. It made the ancient pagan festivals and local superstitions much more appealing as a form of collective spiritual resistance and as means of preserving remnants of ethnic identity. The last thing a Latvian serf would want would be to live in the same place as his/her German masters in the afterlife.

In this sense the very arrival of the Moravian Brethren to Livonia was already good news. They brought a completely new gospel message to the Latvian peasants. Although some of the passages may have been familiar to the peasants from the German Lutheran pastors, the interpretation and context was completely new and surprising. Bible reading and communal Bible studies spread very rapidly. More and more people wanted to be able to read the Bible and to make their children literate. In places where Brethren communities formed, people became more conscious of their lifestyle: they stopped using alcohol and tobacco and they offered a helping hand to others. Their attitude changed and hatred was cancelled by love. For the first time in many generations they had experienced unconditional love and respect for their human dignity.

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[20] Johansons, 250-254, 273-281; Arturs Prieditis, *Latvijas Kultūras Vēsture*, (Daugavpils: 2000), 88-89; G. Straube "Vidzemes Brāļu Draudzes Un Krievijas Iekšpolitika Baltijā 1817-1860," in the collection of conference papers *Latvija un Krievija: Vēsturiskie un Kultūras Sakari*, (Riga: 1987), 61-65; Aleksejs Apinis, *Neprasot Atļauju: Latviešu Rokrakstu Literatūra 18. un 19. gadsimtā*, (Riga: 1987), 12-17.

Although the conservative ruling body of the German aristocracy, the *Landtag,* was suspicious of the missionary work of the Moravian Brethren, the movement enjoyed support and even had a following among some more liberal members of the local German aristocracy. Shortly after the arrival of the first three Moravian missionaries (Christian David, Timothy Fidler, and Johannes Fidler "the Bohemian") in 1729, the owner of the *Valmiermuiža* estate, Magdalene Von Hallardt, offered her lands as a safe-haven and home for missionary work in Latvia and Estonia.[21]

Christian David's vision of creating an indigenous missionary network shaped the character of the whole movement. He learned Latvian with eagerness and soon was able to preach in it. He insisted on educating Latvians and training them as teachers who could further teach their compatriots. In a letter to Zinzendorf he wrote: "If God can awaken stones making them into Abraham's children, then He certainly can awaken teachers among the Latvians."[22]

The visit of Ludwig Von Zinzendorf to Latvia and Estonia in 1736 became a historical landmark event. Many more liberal German aristocrats joined the movement, which grew almost exponentially among the Latvian peasants. Latvians, accustomed to see Germans only as their merciless masters, were astonished to encounter a German nobleman walking along Latvian country roads on foot, saluting peasants, shaking hands with them, and engaging in friendly conversations. They perceived the presence of Zinzendorf as a theophany. One of the peasants, Ķīšu Pēteris, later described his immediate conversion experience as follows: "When I saw him I was overcome by such beatitude as if I were looking at our dear Saviour Himself. I met him on the country road, and he saluted me and shook my hand in a friendly manner. On the way home I wept and could not understand how this godly man could love me, a sinner."[23]

With Zinzendorf's help in 1738 the first Latvian Teachers' Seminary opened in the city of Valmiera. The Pentecost of 1739 became known as the Great Religious Awakening in Latvia when so many peasants came to hear the sermon that the service had to be held outdoors in an open field. A contemporary of these events, a German doctor, Butebardt, described the spread of the religious enthusiasm among the peasants with these words: "Flames have come down from Heaven."[24]

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[21] Andrejs Johansons, *Latvijas Kultūras Vēsture: 1700-1800* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1975) 274.
[22] *Ibid*. 275.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *Ibid*. 276.

Conclusion

Ethnic tension between Latvian and Russian communities of Latvia has a decades-long history. Ideologically it rests on two incompatible interpretations of history where in each of the versions the labels of good and evil are assigned to different actors. The local Latvian and Russian language press contributes to the tension by continuously disseminating hate messages.

René Girard's mimetic theory and several other theories are helpful as hermeneutical keys in understanding the collective processes behind the hostility and in thinking about potential remedies for such a situation. Just Peace Theory provides valuable guidance on how to connect current political narratives to the gospel narrative. However practical peacemaking in the contemporary Latvian context will need more than just good theory and intellectual understanding of the problem.

Fortunately there are local precedents of non-violent transformation of society, of which the most relevant seems to be the 18th century missionary movement of Moravian Brethren in Latvia and Estonia. This movement managed not only to reconcile the oppressed and oppressors, but also played a decisive role in the birth of a nation and to a great extent shaped the spiritual and intellectual changes happening during the next two centuries. The seeds sown by this movement may still be found even in the contemporary Latvian literature and thinking.

I agree with James McClendon that the gospel stories are narratives, not just edifying tales.[25] In turn, the 18th century Latvian narrative of the Brethren is a powerful witness of how sharing in God's love for *Imago Dei* may reconcile people of enemy groups. It is witness, which has been tested by its fruits; and they have to be found good. Although no one narrative can be exported from one historical context to another, it can still serve as an inspiring example of the transformative application of just peacemaking initiatives. Today, with the advantage of time distance, we are in an even better position than the Brethren of the 18th century. We have the same Gospel as the Herrnhutians had, we have the example of their witness, and we have the theoretical tools for identifying the problem and analyzing it. All that remains is hearing the call and following it; following not as an ideological conviction but as a lived-out Christian narrative.

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[25] James McCendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Witness*, vol.3, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 351.

Forgiveness as a Test-Case of our Theological Convictions

Atanas Atanasov

Abstract

This article, written from a post-communist context, looks at the question of how to deal with the past, and focuses on the nature and practice of forgiveness, seeing it as a key theological conviction. Working with authors such as Hannah Arendt and James McClendon, the article seeks to work out this practice of forgiveness in post-modernity.

Key Words: Forgiveness; Bulgaria; Hannah Arendt; Convictions

In the newly established post-communist democracies the transition period has been prolonged by the parallel existence of older conceptualization models based on totalitarian ideology. The nostalgic sentiments for the 'glorious past' function on multiple levels. There are different memories within different circles of the 'glorious past' or the 'normative past'. Thus, this paper will look at the convergence of these trends of coexisting conceptual models with the understanding of forgiveness. I believe that the turn to the past is rather a flight from current reality as convictions are reduced to ideological constructs to serve current agendas. These highly complex relationships are tested through the practice and the understanding of forgiveness. Forgiveness as a practice and a personally experienced phenomenon is not always reciprocated and is related to one's convictions. It is matter of a personal choice, part of the knowledge of God and of the self. Forgiveness involves personal change in order to be accomplished. Below I shall explore the philosophical, theological and social dimension of forgiveness.

In Bulgarian post-communist society, the totalitarian system is slowly breaking down, which creates certain difficulties for the expected quick results in the socio-economic area of the newly established democratic system. The reason for this situation emerges from thinking and actions in the context of the old totalitarian models. The change in the spiritual realm is even slower. The reason for this slow and gradual change is the continued parallel existence of older models. The whole process of organisation of contemporary formation is going through a period of mourning for the past 'ideal' of the old ideology. Idealistic constructs of the past are lived out today as a flight from reality and problems are masked. Instead of adapting to the new realities we often observe behaviour corresponding to the old norms and models.

Life with others in social space is now experienced quite differently. Individuals in these quickly-changing social realities are now provoked to adapt to new fixed social models. It is imperative that the actions of the individual are informed by her or his moral attributes and motives. However, the dividing line between inner convictions about the true and the right are competing with the criterion for usefulness. In social actions the individual needs to take into consideration the meaning and influence that his or her activity will have on others and how those who are affected are evaluating this influence. But the 'social types most often met with in civic society are the rational-goal oriented ones', as Max Weber reminds us.[1] Today 'pragmatically right' is often accepted as useful. Here a second tendency is to be observed, namely that the useful is then accepted as truthful.

In the postmodern context, the role of religion and the church, which were formerly called to fulfil social functions such as giving rise to evaluative and emotional dispositions and disseminating adequate motivations, is disappearing. Max Weber has foreseen that the 'modern human being could not live any longer (intellectually) with religion and at the same time admitting that it is not quite clear whether he himself could live without religion'.[2] Today an increasing number of adherents agree with Weber's insightful statement that humans cannot live easily without religion. This is a positive sign of an improved perspective toward religion. The church of the living God is left with the challenge of being, as the scriptures say, 'the pillar and support of the truth' for all people: 'but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15 NAS). That would mean either to respond to the deep spiritual needs of humans in their search for the good and the true or merely to 'appease' oneself with the possibility of fulfilling an ideological role connected with a particular social group by expressing the values and the interests of that one (singular) group. The church as a divine construct has a lofty universal (catholic) mission 'in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places'*. (Eph. 3:10 NAS).

The grace of God toward humankind is revealed through the divine forgiveness of sins because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's forgiveness is for all people, not just one particular group. That, in turn,

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[1] Georgi Fotev, *Grazhdanskoto Obshtestvo* [Civil society] (Sofia: Izdatestvo na BAN, 1992), p. 41.

[2] B. Wilson, *Religjata v Sotsialisticheska Perspektiva* [Religion in socialist perspective] (Veliko Turnovo: Praksis, 2001, in Bulgarian), p. 21.

brings an obligation on all people to forgive without selection and prejudice as a condition of being forgiven by God.

The topic of forgiveness unites the value and the possibility for choice that is embedded in the knowledge of the meaning and the aim of humans toward knowledge of God and the self. In the present socio-political context, the use of forgiveness goes beyond its Christian connotation and understanding because a certain ambivalence is kept—especially in political debates where forgiveness is presented as an excuse and sorrowfulness for a particular injustice. Thus, to forgiveness are ascribed qualities and meaning that are derived from crime and punishment legislation. Forgiveness should, however, be different in kind and should not cross over into the territory of criminal law.[3] Forgiveness touches on repentance, which is connected to past experiences of pain and suffering. Grace is the leading motif in the practice of forgiveness, not the seeking of political and economic interests. Forgiveness is first and foremost seen as the real solution in situations of interpersonal human problems and affords opportunities for restitution.

Forgiveness appears as a real answer in a situation of common interpersonal human problems. Forgiveness offers the possibility of restoration and wholeness for which humans were created. 'Forgiveness interrupts the sequence of causes and effect, crimes and punishments; it surpasses the reality of time and actions'.[4] Forgiveness applied in daily life helps a person discover herself (himself) in the world and assures her/his position according to the breadth and the depth of moral theology (cf. Rom. 12:2).

Modernity's objection to Christianity is often connected to objections to the Christian understanding of forgiveness. Forgiveness is often misunderstood as humiliation or weakness. That is, in the process of forgiving, power seems to be given to the forgiven person while the person forgiving another is seen as weakening her/himself.[5] The power of forgiveness and its seriousness is revealed in church tradition and practice. It is an expression of power in the One who forgives rather than of weakness and withdrawal.

Jesus Christ identifies Himself with sinners in order that, by means of forgiveness from God, all may receive restoration of their original state

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[3] J. Derrida, *Vjara i Znanie* [Faith and knowledge] (Sofia, Izdatelska Kashta Lik, 2002, in Bulgarian), pp. 103-104.

[4] J. Kristeva, *Chernoto Slantse* [Black sun] (Sofia: GAL-IKO, 2004, in Bulgarian), p. 213.

[5] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 203.

of fellowship with the Creator.[6] Forgiveness is connected with a concrete present state but through it opportunity is given for change and renewal, as the view toward the future is hopeful. The asymmetry of sin and forgiveness creates favourable conditions as a test of interpersonal relations. Forgiveness is accessible for all and is the responsibility of everyone, but it needs to be practiced out of convictions motivated by the so-called anastatic convictions,[7] that is, out of experience with God, where the person is not after personal gain and opportunistic goals. When practiced internally and externally, the church is safeguarded against turning forgiveness into an ideological tool for 'self-gain'.

Sin and forgiveness are actions inherent to 'human plurality'.[8] 'To act in the broadest sense of the word means to take on an initiative … The very fact that a human is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected in life—sin and forgiveness are both possible'.[9] Sin in its objectivity is connected to a kind of trespassing, a breaching of preliminary established rules. Trespassing, as a rule, leads to certain consequences in interpersonal relationships and the appearance of guilt feelings which are often marginalized in contemporary society. Under the influence of Freudian theorizing, guilt is conceptualized as a feeling incapable of being re-thought which must exist separately. With the absence of a theistic argument and the presence of secularization, the individual is made free in her/his actions when the Other does not present complaints of wrongful doing. Therefore, in this scenario, a sense of guilt is unnecessary.

Hannah Arendt speaks of the active/dynamic construction of the image and identity of humanity in the world by our actions and speech.[10] In the social space, however, there are actions that take on a dimension and image of evil and create a chasm, or asymmetry, between the author of the action and its recipient. As G. Naber points out, 'evils are fragmentations of the personal Dasein ('Being-in-the World'), conflicts and suffering without comprehensible consolation'.[11] The evil could not be determined and defined by the one who experienced it. In these cases, action as transgression of the rules takes on the dimension of evil. This is a state in which the wrongdoer cannot go back in time and repair whatever wrong was done. In this situation, the wrongdoer has only the chance to regret

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[6] P. Evdokimov, *Pravoslavieto* [Orthodoxy] (Sofia: Omofor, 2006, in Bulgarian), p. 123.

[7] James Wm McClendon, Jr. *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abington Press, 2002; originally published 1986), p. 225 ff.

[8] H. Arendt, *Choveshkata Situatsija* [The human condition] (Sofia: Izdatelska Kashta Kritika i Humanism, 1997, in Bulgarian), p. 150.

[9] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 152.

[10] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 153.

[11] P. Ricoeur, *Pametta, Istorijata i Zabravata* [Memory, history and forgetfulness] (Sofia: SOHM, 2006, in Bulgarian), p. 476.

her/his action and to continue life with remorse for the past action. The following question persistently imposes itself on us: In spite of everything, could evil be forgiven and then forgiveness become an opportunity to return from the irreversibility of the now-forgiven act?

Forgiveness is an ability and a personalised action inherent in God and humans. Through forgiveness the image of the doer of this action as a unique reality is revealed. Through the working of forgiveness, 'people become differentiated and not only different; they are modes or ways, in which human beings represent themselves to each other, not as physical objects but as humans'.[12]

The unique ability to forgive is common to all humankind and is universal according to John 20:23: 'If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained'. This general human ability for the action of forgiveness aims at the annulment of past sins and gives us a perspective for the restoration of togetherness. The road that forgiveness uses to overcome irreversibility is love. Love, on the one side, is an attribute of the absolute God. Humans, on the other, are the objects of God's love. The recommendation of the apostle Paul is to aspire after spiritual gifts and more than anything else to aspire to love, which the apostle has presented as a more excellent way (1 Cor.:13).

The deep quintessence of love is demonstrated in the possibility for a return from the irreversible and the irreparable. 1 Corinthians 13:5-6 says that 'love … does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered,* does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth'.

If love '"does not rejoice in evil"', it is because it goes to the place of accusation, imputation, which incorporates the recapitulation for oneself. If love is called for in the present time, it is because its time is a time of permanence'.[13] Love is eternal; it is connected with the absolute God and streams from the Divine Being. It is the greatest of the three—faith, hope and love.

Love is comprehensive and takes the unforgiving into itself and dissolves it. Forgiveness is one of the faces of love that targets the unchangeable and the unforgivable. It is unconditional and does not make exceptions. 'There is forgiveness, if forgiveness exists, only for the

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[12] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 151.
[13] Ricoeur, *Memory, History and Forgetfulness*, p. 480.

unforgivable. It is unconditional and does not make exception. It is possible only if it does the impossible'.[14]

The asymmetry of forgiveness and sin and the difficulty of practicing the action of forgiveness, i.e. the return from the irreversible, Hannah Arendt sees in the 'condition that people are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and incapable of punishing what is unforgivable'.[15] The impossibility for humans to love perfectly is connected with the experienced terror of evil, which is projected onto the evildoer. Arendt postulates that the two greatest challenges to personal existence are connected to the fact that humans have the potential to remember the past, but have no strength to change it, and the power to imagine the future, but not the power to control it completely.[16]

The realisation of the first challenge—the remembering of the past and overcoming it is achievable *via* forgiveness. It streams deep from the human being and releases the other from the guilt born out of the realisation of pain and suffering. Forgiveness cannot erase the memory of the past, but takes away the power of past experience in the memory and allows for liberation from the bondage of hate. The development of the ability to forgive in practice helps us to not focus on personal pain, evil or the evildoer but rather to focus, to gaze upon the image of God in the Other, even the evildoer. Forgiveness helps us to be certain that our Christian convictions and practices are rooted in and motivated by God. In this way, the asymmetry of sin and forgiveness create favourable conditions as a test of interpersonal relations.

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[14] Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 108.
[15] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 202.
[16] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

Ideology, Convictions and Eschatology: Towards a Theological Critique of Ideology from an Eschatological Perspective

Joshua T. Searle

Abstract

The first part of the paper is directed towards the elucidation of an eschatological vision, which I will argue, is capable of countermanding the absolutising tendencies of ideological formulations. Then, after an exploration of some of the key interpretive issues connected with the relationship between ideology, convictions and eschatology, the argument is illustrated by examples of the destructive and transformative applications of eschatology to situations of ideological conflict in the recent history of Northern Ireland. The paper concludes with some suggestions as to how the eschatological vision might be safeguarded against the totalising claims of ideology and employed transformatively towards the resolution of conflict.

Key Words: Ideology; eschatology; conviction; vision

I. Introduction

How and why do good ideas go bad? How can we make sure that good ideas remain good? What is an ideology and wherein lies its influence and significance? At what point do the notions of ideology and eschatology coalesce? Is there such a thing as a pure theological conviction unblemished by ideology? Through an integrated analysis of the concepts of ideology, convictions and eschatology, this paper is directed towards the elucidation of these salient questions. Engaging in a theological appraisal of ideology, I will argue that a proper conception of the critical quality of the notion of eschatology can serve as an important counterweight to the totalising claims of ideologies and their destructive incarnations in oppressive political systems.[1]

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[1] It is appropriate to return to these questions in a publication of the International Baptist Theological Seminary, which has been at the forefront of recent endeavours to formulate incisive critiques of ideological claims from diverse theological perspectives. Among those who have contributed to this ongoing critical task, a notable example is Parush Parushev who used the case of ecclesial communities in the Orthodox tradition in Eastern Europe to investigate the possibilities inherent in post-foundational hermeneutical method, such as the convictional-perspectivist approach developed by James McClendon and others, as a means towards the redemption of the kingdom vision from the trappings of parochial and destructive ideological interests. See Parushev, 'Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On the Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in the Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective' (PhD Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2006). Ivana Noble (Dolejśévá) has been similarly engaged in the task of providing a theological critique of ideology in her *Accounts of Hope: A Problem of Method in Postmodern Apologia* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001)*, which provides a wide-ranging and theoretically engaged apologia of Christian hope that engages with the salient philosophical implications of such critiques in light of the anti-foundationalist currents of postmodern thought. What emerges is an analysis of the epistemological criteria out of which the ideological subversion of Christian

Engaging in a theological critique of ideology, the central case I wish to make is that eschatology can be applied transformatively in order to relativise the claims of ideology as a means of preventing the degeneration of theological ideas into totalising and oppressive ideological incarnations. One constructive way of applying this critique is through the convictional perspectivist approach developed by McClendon and others.

II. Defining the Terms: Ideology, Convictions and Eschatology

The aim here is not to settle the issue regarding a comprehensive definition or to establish a general answer to these questions that will satisfy every scholarly perspective. Our aim is the more modest one of being aware of different applications of these terms, and then to consider how they might be used profitably and without ambiguity in order to answer the questions specifically addressed in context of this paper.

One way to think of ideologies is to consider them as living and active vectors of meaning through which the whole spectrum of human action and emotion coalesce on a set of shared principles. Only through ideology can demotic forces be utilised towards the realisation of a set of common goals based on a particular vision of what constitutes the good, the true and the beautiful. The power of ideology can thus be said to consist in its 'ability to inspire people to organise groups' in order to achieve certain objectives.[2] Given that ideologies can become 'organised systems of belief with ready formulas for the manipulation of the masses',[3] it is easy to perceive their utility to political as well as ecclesiastical powers. Ideology, as a means of 'objectifying moral sentiment',[4] provides (to use the Wittgensteinian phraseology) a common 'grammar' through which subjective claims and interests can be cast in the language of moral norms.[5] In its normative function, an ideology thus facilitates the process through which disparate elements of human existence are conflated into an overarching narrative of directionality and purpose which becomes formative of convictions. As such, the notion of ideology supervenes on the spheres of ethics, epistemology and aesthetics.

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hope arises. More recently, Tim Noble, in his *Keeping the Window Open: The Theological Method of Clodovis Boff and the Problem of the Alterity of the Poor* (Praha: IBTS, 2009), has likewise been occupied with providing a fresh perspective on these questions through his investigation of the interplay between ideology and theology in relation to the discourses of liberation theologies to have emerged from South America.

[2] J Christopher Soper, *Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Great Britain: Religious Beliefs, Political Choices* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 26.

[3] Daniel Bell, quoted in George A. Huaco, 'On Ideology', *Acta Sociologica* 4 (1971): 245.

[4] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 231.

[5] Brad Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

The recognition of the importance of narrative brings us to one of the central points of coalescence between ideology and eschatology. The biblical vision of hope is predicated upon a narrative understanding of history which is deeply rooted in eschatology. The biblical eschatological vision is one of a new creation in which God makes his dwelling in the midst of his people.[6] This vision, first adumbrated by the Hebrew prophets and then embodied in Christ the incarnate Logos, finds its definitive figurative expression in John's Apocalypse, in which is depicted a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. This distinctive depiction of cosmic consummation, in which a redeemed humanity is to enjoy perpetual bliss in this ultimate arena of human fulfilment and flourishing, is arguably one of the loftiest conceptions of human destiny ever to have been produced by the creative exercise of the human imagination and has been a wellspring of hope for millions throughout history.

Eschatology, however, has its dark sides—a fact to which the bloody history of the twentieth-century readily testifies. Lurking beneath the maniacal fantasies of Adolf Hitler and the ruthless brutality of Joseph Stalin lay an apocalyptic-eschatological conception of history. Hitler believed himself to be engaged in an apocalyptic struggle against the Jews on behalf of Christian civilisation[7] and his concept of the thousand-year Reich was inspired explicitly by the millennial reign of the saints prophesied in Revelation 20.[8] Moreover, the apocalyptic undertones of the Nazi conception of the 'Final Solution' (*die Endlösung*) are unmistakably apparent.[9] Similarly Communism, which some have argued was just as much a messianic, apocalyptic religion as it was a political ideology,[10] is another notable example of how apocalyptic and utopian ideas can be harnessed and used for political ends.[11] Summing up the tension between the positive hopeful and negative dehumanising aspects of ideologies, T M

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[6] Cf. Isaiah 54:11-12; 61:3, 10; 65:13-22; Revelation 21:3.

[7] Michael Burleigh's work, *The Third Reich: A New Study* (London: Pan Books, 2001), devotes considerable attention to the messianic aspects of Nazi ideology. See also Thomas Idinopulos, 'Nazism, Millenarianism and the Jews', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40 (2003): 298.

[8] Thomas Robbins and Susan J Palmer (eds.), *Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 9; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages* (London: Random House/Pimlico, repr. 1993). Cohn refers to such beliefs as aspects of a pathological condition which he identifies as 'revolutionary millennialism'. This belief, according to Cohn, manifested destructive tendencies and was the ideological foundation the Crusades and National Socialism. The term 'Third Reich' is an expression used by the medieval apocalyptic seer, Joachim of Flora. See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 12-13.

[9] Moltmann makes this association in the foreword to his *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (München: Kaiser, 1995).

[10] This point was made by Parush Parushev in his paper at the conference at which this paper was originally delivered.

[11] This claim was made by Fritz Gerlich, in his book, *Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich* (München: Bruckmann, 1920), in which he described Communism as 'ein Kind des neueren Chiliasmus'.

Philip makes the lapidary point that, 'if ideology means human potential, it also involves risk and it necessitates a critical appropriation of ideologies from a Christian theological viewpoint'.[12]

The notion of 'convictions' is important to our discussion of the interrelation between ideology and eschatology because both the essential nature and the moral manifestations of an ideology are determined primarily by the convictions of those for whom the ideology is taken as normative. The convictional perspectivist approach of McClendon and others offers an insightful but by no means infallible approach with which to consider the ethical implications of Kierkegaard's dictum that 'subjectivity is truth'.[13] Several theologians and philosophers have established a certain degree of unanimity on the point that to be human means to live in a world constituted by signs and that it thus belongs to the human condition to be involved in an unceasing hermeneutical process of interpreting the world through a process that is informed by an implicit set of *a priori* suppositions.[14] Gadamer recognised that 'it is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being ... They are simply conditions whereby we experience something'.[15] In other words, 'we do not arrive at these conditions after a consideration of all the facts; we simply find ourselves already living under these conditions'.[16]

Among theologians this growing acknowledgement has provoked a renewed interest in narrative-formed communities as the main crucibles in which one's presuppositions are formed.[17] There is a widespread recognition that the core beliefs of communities as well as individuals are shaped by a particular narrative which guides the community's moral vision and that the convictional community has a logical priority in determining the content of the convictions of its members.[18] As Parushev explains, 'the narrativist understanding of reasoning acknowledges that a person's interpretative process is communal and historical in its very

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[12] T M Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology: An Exploration into the Communicative Theory of M. M. Thomas* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1986), p. 63.

[13] S Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 187.

[14] Parushev, 'Dawn of the Light', p. 4.

[15] H G Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* David Linge (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 9.

[16] P R Horn, *Gadamer and Wittgenstein on the Unity of Language* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 5.

[17] James Wm McClendon and James M Smith, following the Dutch philosopher William Zuurdeeg, used the term 'conviction' to describe such core beliefs. See McClendon and Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. 5. Gadamer used the term 'legitimate prejudice'. Gadamer argued that 'the prejudice of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitutes the historical reality of his being' (*Truth and Method,* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [New York: Continuum, 2003], p. 277).

[18] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions,* p. 101.

nature'.[19] Furthermore, since a 'realistic narrative'[20] has 'the power to express and to form [the] character both of an individual and of a community',[21] it follows that eschatology, as a means of interpreting the end of the story is vital to a proper understanding of the convictions of the faith community for whom the realistic narrative is normative. Eschatology, in this view, is thus the way that Christian faith communities articulate their convictions regarding the end of the narrative vision that they seek to embody. Eschatology, however, as theologians remind us,[22] is not simply, or even primarily, about endings, but gives perspective on the preceding parts of the narrative. This insight is consistent with significant developments in literary criticism, which emphasise the end of a story as that which establishes the meaning and pattern of the whole narrative.[23] Eschatology is thus the Christian discourse of hope through which the faith community aspires to create possibilities according to their underlying convictions, which Parushev defines simply as visions of 'construing the world according to [one's] best inspirations'.[24]

Another crucial point of distinction between ideology and convictions is that whereas ideologies can to some extent be transcribed and enunciated into understandable statements such as declarations of independence or bills of rights, convictions because of their very proximity to us individually and communally are inherently inarticulable. If I were to hold a book right up to my face so that my eyes were nearly to touch the paper, I would no longer be able to read or make sense of the words on the page. The same principle applies *a fortiori* to our convictions which are so proximate and so much a part of us that we are unable to recognise them or put into words what they are. We may thus be unaware of their power on our lives, as McClendon notes. This idea is captured by the ancient Chinese

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[19] Parush Parushev, 'Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning', in *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning,* Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Theological Symposium of the International Postgraduate, Theological Fellowship, February 14-16 2007, Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă and Brian Brock (eds.) (Praha: IBTS Publisher, 2007).

[20] Hans W Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 16.

[21] Parushev, 'Convictions'. Notwithstanding the imprecise charges of relativism often made by ill-informed critics, McClendon and other post-foundationalist theologians do not set out to disavow the existence of truth or meaning; rather, like deconstructionist approaches to philosophy and literary criticism their aim was to unmask the partisan nature of the supposedly objective appeals to transcendental logocentric principles by which political and social structures, appealing to such timeless axioms, exercise domination. This approach, I maintain, is entirely consistent with the critical imperative of Christian scholarship to cast down oppressive ideological strongholds.

[22] Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning,* trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 2003), x. Moltmann's understanding of eschatology owed much to Karl Barth who taught that eschatology was not about the end of the world but about the relationship between historical time and divine timelessness. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1, p. 530f.

[23] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*.

[24] Parushev, 'Convictions'.

proverb which states that of all the animals the fish is the one that is least aware of water. Similarly, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount noted that one is inclined to notice the speck in the eye of one's neighbour whilst being oblivious to the plank in one's own. One of the uses of eschatology is that it enables us to recognise the relativity of our unspoken convictions whilst affirming the one certainty to which all our hopes are directed—the victory of the Lamb and the time of eschatological consummation when God will gather together all things in Christ (Revelation 5:9; Ephesians 1:10).

III. An Eschatological Critique of Ideology

Eschatology, as God's last word on human accomplishment and endeavour, is the great leveler of all human discourse and value judgements. Eschatology announces not only that 'the end of all things is at hand' (1 Peter 4:7) but also that 'the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (2 Peter 3:10). Eschatology, as Miguel Bonino put it, 'prompts us to move in the direction of the kingdom, but it also leads us to recognise the penultimate and partial character of all our achievements'.[25] In sounding the reminder of human finitude, eschatology also reminds us of something that ideology predisposes us to disregard: that it belongs to the human condition both to judge and to be judged in equal measure. Eschatology echoes the ringing declaration of the trumpet-blowing angel of the Apocalypse that 'the great day of his [God's] wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' (Revelation 6:17). This declaration is all the more pertinent when considered in conjunction with the Psalmist's shattering assertion, later echoed by the Apostle, that 'there is none that doeth good, no not one' (Psalm 14:3)[26] or the tragic realisation of John who in his Revelation discovered that after searching the whole earth, no-one—other than the slain Lamb of God—was found to be worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals (Revelation 5:1-9). Eschatology thus reminds us that all our value judgements themselves stand under judgement.

Another contribution made by eschatology to the theological critique of ideology consists in the potential for eschatology, rooted in the Christian story, to countermand the inherent tendency towards absolute claims exhibited by ideological formulations. The eschatological vision that emerges from the Christian narrative is universal, involving people of every tribe, tongue and nation (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). This vision cannot be

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[25] Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 129.

[26] Romans 3:10: "There is none righteous, no, not one."

contained within a particular community; neither can the hope to which it testifies become the exclusive possession of any one group or nation. 'The idea about the restoration of all things', insists Moltmann, 'shows very well the comprehensive dimensions of hope for the coming of the creative God; it is a hope which embraces the whole world'.[27] History bears unhappy witness, however, to countless instances of the subversion of the inclusivity of the all-encompassing vision of a God-glorifying kaleidoscope of redeemed humanity into a narrow, monochrome parochial fixation of a particular people group which arrogates the apocalyptic beatitudes exclusively to itself. Through a certain process of ideological subversion of eschatological hope, the divine, transcendent glory of individual and cosmic salvation has been co-opted to serve the interests of the all-too-human passions of egoism and self-interest.

Narratives of national exceptionalism such as American Manifest Destiny or the Nazi doctrine of the master race can inculcate convictions that give rise to ideologies of racial and national superiority which often involve the nationalisation of God. God, under these circumstances, is often used 'to give legitimacy to political arrangements of power or aspirations which are dominating or excluding'.[28] Arguably the most flagrant manifestation of the parochial subversion of eschatology among Northern Ireland evangelicals during the 'Troubles' was the doctrine of British-Israelism.[29] This doctrine was the ideological progeny of the kind of remnant theology that exerted a considerable influence on Northern Ireland evangelicals throughout the 'Troubles'. British-Israelism posits the notion that the royal line of the British family can be traced back to the ancient Irish king Eochaid who, it was claimed, in the sixth century before the birth of Christ, married the daughter of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. The British Crown Jewels, it is alleged, bear a distinct resemblance to the gems associated with the Royal House of ancient Judah, which, allegedly, 'symbolically represent many of God's covenants with his chosen people'.[30] All the kings and queens since ancient times were thus seen to be descended directly from the royal house of King David. This notion of the

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[27] Moltmann, *In the End*, p. 151.

[28] *Connections* (publication of the Northern Ireland reconciliation community, Corrymela) (volume 3, 2001), p. 23.

[29] Although British-Israelite convictions are alluded to in several studies of Northern Ireland evangelicalism, most references are cursory observations that do not address the remnant theology from which British-Israelite convictions were born and nurtured. Recent scholarship exhibits a variety of opinion from those who caution against exaggerating its importance, such as Steve Bruce's, *Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), to others who maintain that British-Israelite sentiment continues to exert a significant influence on evangelical thinking even to the present day. See Claire Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 124-125.

[30] *Orange Standard* (July, 1984), p. 8.

messianic descent of the British royal family was tied to an eschatological understanding of history, as the following quotation from a leading exponent of British-Israelism indicates:

> Just as William of Orange, a Prince of the House and Lineage of David came to Britain's Royal Throne and delivered God's people in the Isles, North and West of Palestine, by the overthrow of priest craft, popery and tyrannized power, so in like manner He who is great David's greater Son is coming again to cut short the days of tribulation, to save His own elect people and destroy Mystery Babylon.[31]

British-Israelism was not merely a particular theory about royal succession; it also asserted that the Anglo-Saxon people constituted the ten tribes that were 'lost' after the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C (2 Kings 17:18). These ten lost tribes, it was claimed, fled to Europe and eventually settled in Great Britain, or as it was often termed, 'Anglo-Saxon Israel'.[32] Some exponents claimed that the reference to the word 'great' in God's promise to Abraham ('I will make thee a *great* nation') was a direct allusion to *Great* Britain, which his remnant people was supposedly to inhabit.[33]

In Northern Ireland British-Israelite thought was present not merely in the minds of its adherents; it was embodied in cultural artifacts such as the regalia of the Orange orders and Loyalist wall murals throughout Northern Ireland.[34] British-Israelite sentiment was often couched in the language of biblical eschatology. 'Once we know that we are Israel', remarked one anti-Catholic Pentecostal pastor and leading exponent of British Israelism, 'we will want to dig into the Scriptures and search out every passage, every chapter, every verse which gives us an enlightenment [*sic*] on Israel's ultimate destiny and our part in God's great plan'.[35] Out of such convictions arose an ideology of racial superiority—a doctrine of the intrinsic greatness of the British people as a remnant nation chosen by God and given the land of 'Ulster' to be a light among the nations. Connecting this belief with an apocalyptic-eschatological understanding of the fate of Northern Ireland, British Israelites insisted,

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[31] Alan Campbell, *Let the Orange Banner Speak* (Belfast: Open Bible Ministries, 1997), p. 30.

[32] Alan Campbell, *British-Israel: Fact of Fiction (*Belfast: Open-Bible Ministries, 1989), p. 6.

[33] Far from being the preserve of a few fanatics, British-Israelism, claimed the Jewish historian Tudor Parfitt in 2002, had millions of adherents worldwide. See Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: the History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002), p. 57.

[34] Stephen J Nolan, 'Communicative success in political wall murals in Northern Ireland: A critical discourse analysis' (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2003), pp. 247-250.

[35] Campbell, 'British-Israel', p. 28.

Britain is part of God's vineyard, Ulster is our own Promised Land, peopled by the very seed of Israel, planted here as a light in darkest Ireland, and we must occupy until Jesus comes.[36]

The ideology of British-Israelism provides a textbook example of a parochial subversion of the universal eschatological vision. Far from overcoming the antagonism between the 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' communities, the vision was subverted in such as way as to perpetuate the antagonism by adding an eschatological dimension to existing sectarian enmity. The uncritical identification of Northern Ireland evangelicals as a special covenant people set apart in order to fulfill an eschatological role created a mentality which could assume that any other group that resisted British or Unionist aspirations was a latter-day enemy of the faithful Christian remnant of 'Ulster Protestants'. Since such groups were perceived to be acting on behalf of Antichrist or even Satan himself, the destruction of such people was justified not merely in terms of the parallels with the ruthless killing of the Canaanite tribes by the ancient Israelites;[37] their expurgation was also elevated to a level of an eschatological imperative among some groups of Northern Ireland evangelicals who considered themselves to be living in the last days and fighting the 'Lord's battle' against the Antichrist (i.e. the Pope) and his apostate religious system of Babylon (i.e. the Catholic Church).

If the power of ideology can be said to consist in its ability to mobilise people in support of a set of political objectives[38] the British-Israelite notion of national particularity possessed distinctive ideological resonance among many Northern Ireland evangelicals during the 'Troubles'. As a means towards the objectification of moral sentiment,[39] the British-Israelite ideology sought to elevate a particular subjective belief to the level of a doctrinal imperative using the language of biblical eschatology. The ideological grammar of British-Israelism paved the way towards the 'domestication' of eschatology, which was used to objectify the national pretensions and political power of a particular self-styled 'remnant' people.[40] As such, British-Israelite ideology in Northern Ireland

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[36] Campbell, 'British-Israel', p. 29.

[37] These parallels between the ancient Israelites and contemporary Northern Ireland Loyalists were sometimes based on Deuteronomy 7:2 which reads: 'and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them'. This verse was used in a Loyalist wall mural in the Sandy Row area of Belfast. This text and its use in Loyalist wall murals is examined in more detail in B Graham and P Shirlow, 'The Battle of the Somme in Ulster Memory and Identity', *Political Geography* 21 (September, 2002): 881-904.

[38] J Christopher Soper, *Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Great Britain: Religious Beliefs, Political Choices* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 26.

[39] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 231.

[40] Writing about the 'domestication' of apocalyptic eschatological texts throughout American history, Cook argues that 'to equate fantastic apocalyptic images with real women, Native Americans, or any

during the 'Troubles' represents a classic example of how the eschatological vision of hope can degenerate into a 'closed ideological system based on sustaining relations of power'.[41] Recent scholarship has examined other notable instances in which this process has occurred with baneful humanitarian consequences.[42]

IV.   The   Transformative   Application   of   the Eschatological Critique of Ideology

It belongs to a robust eschatological critique of ideology not to expose instances of ideological manipulation, but also to consider the constructive uses of eschatology as a means towards the reclamation of the universal implications of the eschatological vision. This must be done without thereby becoming merely another expression of the kind of perverted ideologies that brought us Auschwitz, Jonestown, Waco and the killing fields of Rwanda and Cambodia. One way of so reclaiming the universal vision without developing a corresponding oppressive ideology is to employ the theological notion of peaceable participation. Among baptistic communities this notion of participation finds expression in a shared involvement in the Christian story. This notion of participation is intrinsic to the eschatological vision itself and is present both at the beginning of the Christian story in the creation ordinance given to Adam to rule over all the creatures of the earth and at the end of the final consummation which concludes with the emphatic declaration that God's home shall be among his people and they will reign with him for all eternity (Genesis 1:28; Revelation 22:5). If we accept that this notion of participation and reigning is intrinsic to the cosmic drama in which people are invited to partake and that narrative is formative of convictions, it follows logically that fidelity to this narrative will inculcate convictions that are consistent with this vision of working together to achieve the purposes intrinsic to the eschatological vision.

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other cross section of humanity is a tragic failure of human imagination'. See his *Apocalyptic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), pp. 53-54.

[41] Dolejšová (Noble), *Accounts of Hope,* p. 285.

[42] Taking the example of the misuse of the book of Revelation by American political elites, Michael Northcott notes that it is 'a tragic deformation of biblical apocalyptic that in America for more than two centuries millennialism, far from unveiling empire, has served as a sacred ideology that has cloaked the expansionary tendencies of America's ruling elites'. See his *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I B Tauris, 2004), p. 75. Stephen Cook argues that the use of eschatological biblical texts to uphold rather than to critique ideological suppositions has been a recurring theme in the interpretation of these texts. Writing about the 'domestication' of apocalyptic eschatological texts throughout American history, Cook argues that 'to equate fantastic apocalyptic images with real women, Native Americans, or any other cross section of humanity is a tragic failure of human imagination'. See his *Apocalyptic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), pp. 53-54.

Such positive and transformative uses of eschatology as a theologically-robust critique of ideological claims were not entirely lacking in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Among those who put eschatology to the service of social inclusion and the proclamation of universal hope, there was commonly an acknowledgement that to read such texts 'is to enter a new symbolic universe'.[43] In the Northern Ireland context of sectarianism, this semantic field of discourse offered new imaginative possibilities for overcoming the conventional distinctions between 'Protestant' and 'Catholic'. In the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, many Northern Ireland evangelicals began to recognise that eschatology, rooted in the resurrection, constitutes, as McClendon put it, 'a new way of construing the world; it is the transformation of human life' in its individual, communal and anastatic dimensions.[44] Such perspectives were common among the organisation known as Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI).[45] Its leaders recognised that 'the Bible's vision is of humanity united in worship and praise' and they used apocalyptic texts such as Revelation 7:9-10 in order to support such claims.[46] The eschatological vision was thus presented in terms of its universal application.

Expressions of affirmation of the universal eschatological hope were often used to promote a vision of social inclusion that would counterbalance the dichotomising influence of the prevailing sectarian mentality. The Northern Ireland Presbyterian minister, John Dunlop, contended that, 'We could do with more of our life marked by agility; more affirmation of joy beyond sorrow; more celebration of apocalyptic extravagance using the doxologies sung by choirs composed of millions from all over the earth (Revelation 5:11-13)'. Such celebration of 'apocalyptic extravagance', he suggested, would promote 'a mental attitude which is … capable of accommodating diversity'.[47] In contrast to parochial interpretations of apocalyptic texts, as exhibited by British-Israelism, such statements could be said to constitute a positive contextual appropriation of eschatology.

The convictional perspectivist approach of McClendon and others offers an interesting viewpoint from which to perceive the factors

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[43] Cook, *Apocalyptic Literature*, p. 194.

[44] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 270.

[45] ECONI's launch can be traced to the publication of its influential booklet, entitled 'For God and His Glory Alone', which was written as a direct and deliberate polemical riposte to the traditional Unionist slogan 'For God and Ulster'.

[46] ECONI, *Thinking BIBLICALLY, building PEACE* (Belfast: ECONI, 2002), p. 128.

[47] John Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1995), p. 81, 91.

underlying the transfiguration of eschatology in the Northern Ireland context from a parochial ideology inculcating sectarian enmity into a universal vision which acted as a catalyst for social inclusion. It might be observed that beginning in the early 1990s many Northern Ireland evangelical communities underwent what Alistair MacIntyre might have called an 'epistemological crisis'. Such crises, argues MacIntyre, arise when an individual 'comes to recognise the possibility of systematically different possibilities of interpretation, of the existence of alternative and rival schemata which yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on around him.[48] Such periods of epistemological disorientation are resolved, he continues, 'only by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand both how he or she could have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them'.[49] The resolution of an epistemological crisis, therefore, always awaits the emergence of an alternative narrative that can give a perspective on the shortcomings of the previous narrative and that also yields new insights and proposals for how to progress.

It is thus significant that the critique of evangelical abuses of eschatology to support ideologies of national domination and political power was launched and sustained by evangelicals themselves. In Northern Ireland a legacy of mistrust and suspicion handed down through several generations and the narrative of persecution which had enabled evangelicals to identify themselves as a persecuted minority had elevated unexamined cultural prejudices to the level of theological axioms. These axioms, such as the conflation of divine destiny and national aspiration epitomised by the immortal slogan, 'For God and Ulster', became so ingrained in the identity of some communities, that they were adhered to almost unquestioningly, even to the extent that we might classify them as a type of McClendonian 'conviction'—a tenaciously held belief that does not lend itself to easy articulation and is to a great extent impervious to self-criticism.[50] For many Northern Ireland evangelicals who had been nurtured in these convictions, the notions of judgement, universality and mystery associated with the eschatological critique of ideology provided an opportunity to become conscious of these previously unexamined assumptions and to question their legitimacy.

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[48] Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and the Philosophy of Science', in *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology,* Stanley Hauerwas and L Gregory Jones, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 139.
[49] Ibid., p. 140.
[50] McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 22.

Eschatology in this instance thus not only provided a critical perspective from which to scrutinise their own convictions; it also provoked an epistemological crisis that yielded an alternative to the old patterns of thinking which had been based on the conviction that 'God' and 'Ulster' were interdependent categories. Such alternatives manifested themselves in new perspectives which sought to overturn sectarian or nationalistic notions with an inclusive, universal conception of God whose desire was to create an eschatological community consisting of every tribe, tongue and nation. In some instances these convictions found expression in terms of the transformative eschatology of the present developed by Jürgen Moltmann. Indeed if one reads carefully Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* in conjunction with many of the texts produced by these revisionist evangelicals in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, many of these passages read like exact paraphrases of extracts from Moltmann's classic work. These examples taken from the recent history of Northern Ireland serve as an exemplification of the potential subversion of the eschatological vision of hope by ideological interests as well as the possible transformative applications to which eschatology can be put in volatile contexts such as the 'Troubles'.

The eschatological vision may be said to constitute the negation of ideology, for the notion of common participation in building the peaceable kingdom which is intrinsic to the eschatological vision, far from being ideologically constituted, is in fact antithetical to the ideological will to dominate. Eschatology negates ideology in so far as it countermands the claims to power underlying the totalising claims of ideological discourses. The eschatological vision which forms the culmination of the eschatological *telos* is utterly divested of all power. It has no power because it is not the exclusive possession of one interpretive community to use as a weapon in a power game *vis-à-vis* another interpretive community. In the case of apocalyptic-eschatological texts, the most natural interpretive community is the church. The vision of eschatological hope is powerless in the sense that it does not stand in an external relation to the church; there can thus of necessity be no coercive force. Rather, among evangelical interpretive communities the vision is a living and active principle which arises from within the churches' relationships with each other and can never take the form of a directive issued from on high by one church to another. The 'power' of the promised eschatological presence consists only in its irresistible powerlessness[51], symbolised by the evocative image of the

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[51] John Caputo alludes to the notion of 'the power of powerlessness' in the formulation of his 'Theology of the Event', noting that, 'The kingdom of God is a domain in which weakness *reigns'*. See Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 12-17 and *passim.*

messianic Lamb of the book of Revelation. Indeed, the absolute powerlessness of the presence in the apocalyptic-eschatological narratives has never been more strikingly asserted than in this plain statement that 'the definitive manifestation of God's character in history'[52] is a slain lamb.

In order to guard against the degenerate impulses, such as the will to dominate and subjugate, the eschatological vision requires a vigilant humility by which we mean the abdication of the claim to omniscience by the acknowledgement that all our perceptions (including our perceptions of God) are unavoidably formed by our convictions which have emerged out of the story of our collective and individual lives. Since, as we remarked previously, our convictions remain hidden from us, a robust conception of eschatology serves an important function of opening our convictions up to the scrutiny of others. Thus, as William Frank well remarks, 'Rather than forcing submission of others to our preconceived schemas of comprehension, or else submitting, more than provisionally, to theirs, we need to learn to travel together into the unknown of the future'.[53] The efficacy of the eschatological critique of ideology to a considerable extent rests on the acceptance of the element of humility born of the conviction that the 'truth' is always something that will evade our best efforts to possess or dominate it. As soon as we begin to think that we have finally fathomed the mind of God, for instance, and assume that this privileged status confers upon us the right to impose our 'truth' on others we thereby set out on the same ideological journey taken by many of the most malevolent and even murderous ideologies to have emerged in recent as well as ancient times. The most cursory survey of the history of ideologies will suffice to testify to the truth of James Allison's remark that 'being greatly mistaken in our whole perception of this world, including the things of God, is part of the human condition'.[54]

Given the fact of human fallibility, it follows that all ideological constructs will reflect this imperfection. As Kant once put it, nothing straight can ever be made from the crooked timber of humanity.[55] It is thus imperative to acknowledge the alterity of God who is the One 'shrouded in clouds and thick darkness' (Psalm 97:2) and admit that any effort we might make to formulate concepts as aids to our understanding can never be more

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[52] Sigve K Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 3.

[53] William Frank, 'Breaking-Open of Dialogue: A Negatively Theological Perspective', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 47 (April, 2000), p. 75.

[54] James Alison, *Living in the End Times: The Last Things Re-imagined* (London: SPCK, 1997), p. 39.

[55] 'Aus so krummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmert werden', Kant, *Idee zu einer allgeneinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlichter Absicht* (1784) in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8 (1912), p. 23.

than an imprecise groping after truths that will only be made clear to us with any degree of finality at that time of the eschaton when—to borrow from the Johannine phraseology—'we shall see Him as He really is' (1 John 3:2).

In considering the imperative to retain the conception of the inscrutability of God's ways in our eschatological critique of ideology, it is useful to bear in mind the notion of what the ancient Greeks called *peripeteia.* This was a literary trope employed by the classical playwrights which postulates a notion of an ending, the broad outline of which is already known but whose manner of fulfillment remains in the hands of the protagonists who must work creatively to achieve its realisation.[56] Paul Fiddes remarks that

> while the end is certain, God can always do new things; God fulfils promises in unexpected ways, and we can hear the divine voice of promise in many ways. While the end is certain, it is also open because of the freedom of God, and because of the freedom God gives to human beings to contribute to the project of creation.[57]

In other words, 'God fulfils his promises in unexpected ways'.[58] McClendon, too, uses the term 'incalculable surprises' to define the characteristic attribute of the third strand of his ethics, which he calls the anastatic or 'eschatological' strand.[59]

The notion of *peripeteia* thus conceived and recast in the language of Christian eschatology contains great potential to be used in the formulation of viable theological alternatives to oppressive ideologies. This conception enables us to affirm with the process theologians that 'the future is fully and radically open'[60] and to assert that as co-workers with God living in the anticipation of the eschaton we are given the important charge of working together creatively towards the fulfillment of an eschatological reality which we already experience in a proleptic way. The only certainty is the victory of the Lamb and the ultimate triumph of the powers of light over darkness, love over hate and the kingdom of God over the rule of Satan. The manner and means of this victory remain a mystery. Accepting the reality of this mystery, the eschatological critique of ideology

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[56] Aristotle, *Poetics,* Book VI.

[57] Paul S Fiddes, *The Promised End*: *Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 38-39.

[58] Walther Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment, in C Westermann (ed.), *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation,* trans. J L Mays (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 107.

[59] McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 265.

[60] John B Cobb, Jr and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 113.

countermands the latent tendency and occupational hazard of theologians: namely, the 'idolatry of conceptual schemes'[61] and the temptation to colonise God with our concepts[62] -- concepts, which upon mature reflection are often shown to be much better suited to mirror our ideological prejudices than they are to reflect the effulgent magnificence and mystery of the God whose inscrutable ways they profess to elucidate.

V. Conclusions

I conclude by stating a dilemma which arises implicitly out of this paper: few things are as essential to the Christian faith as eschatology and few things are as harmful as a distorted eschatology, particularly when it is used in the service of religious violence or to promote a parochial ideology of national or ethnic superiority. Eschatology is the beating heart of Christian hope, and faith without eschatology is a dead faith in the same way that a man without a heart is a dead man. 'If Christianity be not altogether restless eschatology', insisted Karl Barth, 'there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ'.[63] Barth recognised with St. Paul (1 Corinthians 15) that without eschatology the Christian faith degenerates into an insipid moralism, which is utterly incapable of engendering hope. As I mentioned at the outset, however, in the realm of Christian doctrine there are few beliefs more dangerous than a perverted eschatology, particularly when the distortion of the biblical hope finds violent outlets. Thus, one of the great challenges and opportunities today is to formulate theologically robust eschatological critiques of ideology that correspond to the vision of hope to which the Bible testifies, from Genesis to Revelation.

Such endeavours inevitably involve an element of humility for it must be understood that there is no formulation of the eschatological critique that does not admit of continual refinement and perfection. Indeed, it is intrinsic to the nature of the eschatological vision to continually surpass any conceptual definition that any person or group of people may assign to it. The eschatological vision is not a static conceptual category, but a dynamic and incomplete principle of hope expressed in a metaphor which always resists any politicised attempts to crystallise it into any particular ideology. As Räpple puts it, 'The scene [of eschatological consummation] is not an arrival but a horizon of possibility, a non-completed visionary work that cries out for completion'.[64] Apocalyptic

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[61] Dolejšová (Noble), *Accounts of Hope,* p. 284.

[62] For this phrase, I acknowledge my debt to Peter Rollins' thought-provoking book, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK, 2006).

[63] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* trans. E. C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 314.

[64] Räpple, *Metaphor of the City,* p. 211.

eschatology is inherently dialectical; even when the dialectic seems to collapse in the metaphor of the heavenly city there remains an unmistakable quality of incompleteness about the resulting synthesis.[65]

The kind of resolution envisaged by apocalyptic-eschatological texts is thus not the culmination leading to a fixed synthesis of static perfection but 'a paralogical journey towards the horizon of an eschatological dawn'.[66] The eschatological vision of the kingdom of God is thus inherently non-reducible to an ideology. That being so, it is all the more imperative for theologians to re-engage with the quest for a proper understanding of eschatological critique of ideology and its application not only to Northern Ireland but to other contexts throughout the world in which eschatological narratives remain constitutive of convictions.

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[65] William A. Beardslee, 'Hope in Biblical Eschatology and in Process Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 38 (September, 1970): 236.
[66] Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 16.