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Allan J. McNicol
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ALLAN McNICOL
Scholar for the Church

I have known Allan McNicol for forty-eight years, having met him first at Abilene Christian (then) College in the Fall of 1962 within weeks of his arrival from Australia. I was Allan's floor supervisor on the third floor of McDonald dormitory—a converted girls' dorm with no air-conditioning, occupied mostly by west Texans. Allan found himself in what must have been a jarring experience as he pondered the meaning of words and phrases such as “y'all,” “dawg,” “shar,” “gonna,” “fixin' ta,” and “narter comin'.”

In spite of culture shock, however, Allan was able to adapt. He was accepted by peers and professors and excelled in his academic work at ACC (BA, MA), Yale (BD), and Vanderbilt (Ph.D.). In 1972, Allan accepted a call to teach in the University Church of Christ Bible Chair (est. 1918) at the University of Texas. In time the Bible Chair would become the Institute for Christian Studies (in association with ACU), eventually gaining independent accreditation as Austin Graduate School of Theology.

Allan's experience as an outsider in America, along with his intellectual gifts and talents, has served him and others—e.g., AGST and the church—quite well. Perhaps it was his somewhat “outsider” perspective to “Bible belt” America that occasionally predisposed him to reassess and challenge long-standing practices and perspectives both in the church and in the academy. For years, Allan has been part of a research group of New Testament scholars who have challenged widely accepted views of the Gospel of Mark as the earliest of the four Gospels and have made a plausible case for the priority of Matthew and Luke.

I have no doubt that Allan's faith, character, academic training, and unique perspectives have been a major asset, indeed a blessing, to AGST—students and faculty—and to American churches. Allan's many articles in

Christian Studies and his monographs on *Preparing for Baptism* and *Preparing for the Lord's Supper* exemplify "scholarship for the church."

Allan's wife Patricia and sons Chris and Rob (wife Mica) and grandchildren Rhys and Braeden have provided support and love that have been important to his productive life of scholarship and teaching. The faculty, administration, and friends of AGST share with them a grateful respect and appreciation for this dedicated man of God on the occasion of his 70th birthday. This issue of *Christian Studies* includes articles in honor and in celebration of Allan's scholarship for the church, written by colleagues and friends.

Michael R. Weed

Paul and Spiritual Formation

James W. Thompson

After centuries in which the term “spiritual formation” was used almost exclusively for the formation of priests, it has become one of the most popular topics in contemporary religious literature, seminary curricula, and programs of the church. It is no longer a Roman Catholic topic, but is the common concern of Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, and mainline Protestants. While these traditions have different understandings of spiritual formation, they are united in their focus on the concept. They are also united in their focus on individual spiritual disciplines, including prayer, individual Bible study, fasting, and contemplation.

Although Paul never used the term “spiritual formation,” he is the ultimate source of this phrase. “Spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) is the term that Paul applies to believers (Gal 6:2; cf. 1 Cor 2:13–15), who have received the Spirit. Formation is a uniquely Pauline word. The apostle looks forward to the last day when Christ will “transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed (*symmorphon*) to the body of his glory” (Phil 3:21). God’s ultimate purpose is that believers be “conformed (*symmorphous*) to the image of the Son” (Rom 8:29) at the end. This ultimate formation requires a continuing process among believers, who begin their Christian experience in “newness of life” (Rom 6:4), but with temptations from their previous existence that they must put away.

In response to the problems in Galatia, Paul describes himself as the expectant mother in the midst of birth pangs “until Christ is formed”

(*morphōthē*) in the readers (Gal 4:19). He speaks twice of the “metamorphosis” among believers, both assuring them that “we are being transformed” (*metamorphoumetha*, 2 Cor 3:18) and urging them not to “be conformed to this world,” but to be “transformed (*metamorphousthe*, Rom 12:2) by the renewing of their minds. Thus as Paul’s frequent use of *morph-* suggests, spiritual formation was a major goal of his ministry.

Despite the popularity of spiritual formation in current literature, the term remains elusive, for the phrase is now used in a variety of ways. In some instances, it is used synonymously with “spirituality,” a term that is understood in many different ways. In most instances it is used for the practice of individual spiritual disciplines. Since Paul is the ultimate source of the language of spiritual formation, my purpose in this article is to examine his understanding of this concept. I am pleased to write in honor of Allan McNicol, who has devoted his teaching ministry to the formation of others.

Spiritual Formation as the Work of the Spirit

For Paul, formation was undoubtedly “spiritual” insofar as it was the work of the Spirit. Believers are empowered by God’s Spirit (*pneuma*, cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 5:22) and exist because they were “written by the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor 3:3). The Spirit that raised Christ from the dead now dwells among believers (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 3:16), assisting them in prayer (Rom 8:16) and empowering each person for service (1 Cor 12:12–28). Paul scarcely distinguishes the Spirit’s activity from God’s work, for he assures the Philippians that “it is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Thus while “spiritual” is often used today in an undefined way, Paul used the term for the divine activity among believers.

The fact that Paul only uses forms of *morph-* in the passive voice (Rom 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19) indicates that spiritual formation is God’s work. Thus he encourages his readers to place themselves at the disposal of God’s power (cf. Rom 8:1–11) and to “walk by the Spirit” (5:16), knowing that they choose between competing powers (cf. 6:12–23). Spiritual for-

mation occurs among believers when they place themselves at the disposal of the Spirit.

Spiritual Formation as a Corporate Journey

A common theme in current literature is the importance of time with others as a dimension of spiritual formation. Paul would agree on the importance of corporate worship and interaction with a community, but he does not envision spiritual formation as a private experience augmented by the presence of others, but as a fundamentally corporate venture. He not only converts individuals and initiates them on the path of spiritual formation, but he plants churches and anticipates their spiritual growth. Because English does not distinguish the singular from the plural “you,” readers commonly privatize Paul’s letters, which use the singular “you” only rarely. He writes to house churches, assuming that someone will read the letters to the gathered assembly (1 Thess 5:27). Thus his “you” is plural. One may translate his words to the Galatians, “My little children with whom I am in the pangs of childbirth, until Christ is formed *among you*” (Gal 4:19). That is, he envisions the whole congregation as the fetus that is being formed. Similarly, an appropriate translation of his assurance to the Philippians is “It is God who is at work *among you*” (Phil 2:13). The entire community is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 3:16). He expresses the relationship between the community and the individual in 1 Corinthians, declaring that “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (12:27). Individuals, therefore, find their identity within the body of Christ. The community that gathers for worship regularly is not only the aggregate of individuals who need the support of others, for it has a corporate identity. Thus spiritual formation for Paul is the reshaping of communities.

Synonyms for Spiritual Formation. The corporate nature of spiritual formation is evident in instances where Paul does not use the term, but declares that the communities are involved in a corporate narrative that has a past, present, and future. Indeed, he writes letters in the middle of the narrative, assuring readers that God will complete what he began. Paul describes the

beginning as the occasion when he “planted” (1 Cor 3:6), laid a foundation (1 Cor 3:10), became the father (1 Cor 4:15) of his communities, and betrothed them to Christ, the bridegroom (2 Cor 11:3), when they first received his gospel (cf. 2 Cor 3:1–3; Gal 3:1–5; 1 Thess 1:1–10). At this point they were “washed, justified, and sanctified” (1 Cor 6:11). All of these images suggest that the establishment of the church was only the beginning of their formation. He envisions the maturation of infants (1 Cor 3:1–3), the growth of what he planted (1 Cor 3:6), the future construction of the foundation (1 Cor 3:10–17), and the ultimate wedding of the people whom he has betrothed to Christ (2 Cor 11:3).

These images indicate the various synonyms for spiritual formation. In the first place, spiritual formation involves growth from infancy to adulthood. Paul is frustrated with the Corinthians in that they have not proceeded from the childish behavior of self-seeking and competition (1 Cor 3:1–3), and he offers himself as an example of one who has “put away childish things” (1 Cor 13:11–13). In the second place, the church is a vineyard (1 Cor 3:10) in need of watering before God gives the growth. He says nothing about the growth in numbers, but expects his converts to be watered and cultivated and to grow up. In the third place, the church is a betrothed virgin anticipating the wedding. In the fourth place, it is a building under construction.

Paul develops the metaphor of the building at some length, indicating that others build on to the foundation with a variety of materials (1 Cor 3:10–17). At the end, the quality of the building materials will be tested. The entire community is engaged in the process of construction, as Paul suggests in his ethical instructions. He encourages the readers to make their decisions, not for self-seeking reasons, but for the sake of edification (1 Cor 8:1; Rom 14:19; 15:2). The singular criterion for the appropriateness of behavior in the assembly is edification (1 Cor 14:1–5, 26). Indeed, Paul defines his ministry in terms of its effectiveness for their edification (2 Cor 10:8; 12:19). Thus just as the church is being formed, it is also being constructed and will be

constructed until the end. Edification is not a private matter, but the task of building the entire community.

Paul also develops the language of sanctification to describe the formation of the readers, who have not only *been* sanctified (1 Cor 1:22; 6:11), but also are in the process of *being* sanctified in anticipation of the time when they will be wholly sanctified in Christ (1 Thess 5:23). The imagery recalls the experience of Israel and God’s demand that Israel be “holy as God is holy” (Lev 19:2). The passive voice (cf. 1 Cor 1:22; 6:11) indicates that God is active in sanctifying the community in a process that will not be complete until the end.

Paul’s Prayers and Spiritual Formation. Paul writes in the middle of the narrative to ensure that his communities will reach the ultimate transformation at the end. His understanding of spiritual formation becomes most evident in his prayers for the churches. In the opening prayer in Philippians (1:1–11), for example, he refers to the complete narrative of the community’s existence, first giving thanks for their fellowship “from the first day until now” (1:5), referring to the journey that they have already made together. The consistent references to the plural “you” (1:5, 6, 9–11) and the repeated phrase “all of you” (1:4, 7 [twice]) indicates their corporate identity. He elaborates on the corporate journey, “Being persuaded of this, that the one who began a good work will bring it to completion at the day of Christ” (1:6). The prayer describes both the past and the future of the corporate formation of the community. Paul uses the language “begin . . . bring to completion” (*enarchomai . . . epiteleō*) elsewhere with humans as the subject, demonstrating that the completion of a task among humans is no certainty (2 Cor 8:10,11; Gal 3:2; cf. 1 Sam 3:12). Here we note the parallel between 1:5 and 1:6:

Phil 1:5	first day	until	now
Phil 1:6	first day	until	day of Christ

At the beginning of the letter, Paul establishes the narrative framework once-now-then.¹ The church participates in God's cosmic narrative that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. At the beginning is the work of God: the one who "began a good work" at the foundation of the church (cf. "work" in 1:22; 2:30). The focus on God as the one who called the church into being is consistent with Paul's affirmations elsewhere that the church came into being by the power of God. The message came "not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:5). Paul first came to the Corinthians "with a demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that [their] faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4).²

As the prayer indicates, the congregation is a work in progress, for it is not yet conformed to the image of the Son (cf. Phil 3:21). Consequently, Paul assures the readers that God will complete the work and then prays for their ultimate spiritual formation. He prays that "[their] love might abound more and more in full knowledge and full insight" and that they "might approve of the better things" and be "sincere and blameless at the day of Christ" (1:9–11). In the thanksgiving at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, he expresses the confidence that the readers will be "blameless" at the day of Christ (1 Cor 1:8). Similarly, he prays that God would make the Thessalonians "increase and abound in love for one another and for all" so that they may be "blameless before God our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 3:12,13).

These prayers offer an indication of Paul's understanding of spiritual formation. The ultimate transformation involves being "blameless" at the coming of Christ. The petitions indicate that the readers remain a work in progress. Paul's prayers also indicate that spiritual formation consists of ethical maturation in which the converts learn to love each other. Having established communities bound together by neither ethnicity nor social class,

¹ See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 86.

² James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 39.

Paul instructs communities to assume the role of the family, recognizing that many converts have alienated themselves from their own families. Spiritual formation involves not only a life with others, but a life with those whom God has chosen.

Paul's Pastoral Goal and Spiritual Formation. Paul's work was not complete with the planting of churches. On numerous occasions he describes the goal that determines his work. Indeed, he has "anxiety for the churches" (2 Cor 11:28), fearing that they will not reach the goal. Thus a constant thread in Paul's letters is the reminder of his goal for the churches and his comment that, without their formation, he will have failed at the end. One may observe the frequency of Paul's indication that his churches will be his "boast" at the end.

Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. *In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God* (Rom 15:15–17).

Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast (2 Cor 1:12–14).

Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain (Gal 2:2; cf. 4:11).

It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you—

and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me (Phil 2:15,16).

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy! (1 Thess 2:19,20)

In every instance in which Paul declares his pastoral ambition, he indicates that the success or failure of his work will be determined only at the end, when he will either “boast” of his work or realize that his work has been in vain.³ The eschatological horizon is a central feature of Paul’s pastoral ambition. Using language taken from Israel’s story, he refers consistently to the “day” (1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 2:16) that will reveal the quality of his work. He will “boast” of work that has been accomplished (Rom 15:17; 2 Cor 1:4; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 2:19). A church that is “blameless” (Phil 2:15,16) at the coming of Christ is the goal of his work.⁴

Spiritual Formation as Corporate Moral Transformation

Paul takes the idea of a “blameless” people from the Old Testament and Jewish literature, which described those who were faithful in keeping the law and maintained practices that distinguished themselves from others (Ps 15:1,2; cf. Wis 10:5). He envisions a cohesive moral community that shines “like lights in the world” (Phil 2:15) because of its distinct practices. Consequently, every Pauline letter contains moral advice describing the shared morality of the members of the community.

Paul does not give an exhaustive code of conduct, but consistently focuses on the primary aspects of spiritual formation. Indeed, his exhortation to be “transformed by the renewing of [the] mind” (Rom 12:2) and his description of himself as the expectant mother awaiting the time when “Christ is formed” (Gal 4:19) serve as headings for moral advice describing the nature

³ See C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2.301. Paul normally uses the term *kauchēma* (“boast”) in a positive sense for what he is proud of, i.e., work that has been accomplished.

⁴ Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul*, 20–21.

of formation. We may observe both the negative and the positive sides of spiritual formation in Paul's moral advice.

The Negative Side. Paul focuses on the major characteristics of the practices that transformed people put away as he encourages readers to abandon the practices of the surrounding world and of their former existence. After he has spoken of his desire that Christ be "formed" among the Galatians (4:19), he warns the readers against yielding to the desire of the flesh (Gal 5:16; cf. 5:13). The desire of the flesh has two dimensions that are the focal points of all of Paul's moral exhortations. In the first place, he heads the list of "works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19) with sexual immorality (*porneia*), uncleanness (*akatharsia*), and debauchery (*aselgeia*). The triad *porneia*, *akatharsia*, and *aselgeia* appear in two instances (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19), while two of the terms appear together elsewhere (*porneia* and *akatharsia* in 1 Thess 4:3, 8; Col 3:5; Eph 5:3, 5; *aselgeia* with the related word *koitai* in Rom 13:13). The terms also appear separately on numerous occasions. *Porneia* is the most frequently listed among the vices mentioned by Paul⁵ and commonly appears first (cf. 1 Cor 5:10,11; 6:9; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3, 5; Col 3:5). That *akatharsia* (literally "uncleanness" or "impurity") has a sexual dimension is evident in the paraenesis (Rom 1:24; 6:19; Eph 4:19; 1 Thess 4:3, 8). Similarly, *aselgeia* (Rom 13:13; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 4:19), which was used in classical sources to describe wanton or outrageous behavior,⁶ has a specific sexual connotation in Paul.

The transformed existence in Romans 12:1–2 also includes the control of sexual passions, for the larger section on moral instruction (12:1–15:13 is the alternative to the sexual debauchery described in 1:18–32 and the enslave-

⁵ According to Raymond Collins, "of the 110 vices in the New Testament catalogues, *porneia* is the only one mentioned in a majority of texts. It is cited in twelve of the twenty-two lists: Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; 1 Cor 5:10,11; 6:9; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3, 5; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 1:10; Rev 9:21; 21:8; 22:15." *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2000), 80. Cf. also Heb 12:16; 13:4.

⁶ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, eds. *A Greek English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press), 255.

ment to the passions in 6:12–20). Paul envisions a community that no longer lives “in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles” (1 Thess 4:5). Spiritual formation involves submitting themselves to the power of the Spirit, which enables converts to live by a new standard.

Enslavement to the flesh is not limited to sexual vices, as the list of works of the flesh indicates (Gal 5:19–21). Strife (*eris*, cf. Rom 1:29; 13:13; 2 Cor 12:20; Phil 1:15), jealousy (*zēlos*, cf. Rom 13:13; 2 Cor 12:20), drunkenness (*methē*, cf. Rom 13:13), anger (*thumos*, cf. 2 Cor 12:20), envy (*phthonos*, Rom 1:29) and selfish ambition (*eritheia*, cf. 2 Cor 12:20; Phil 1:17; 2:3), in addition to other anti-communal vices, appear not only in Galatians, but throughout Paul’s letters. Indeed, Paul’s indictment of the Corinthians’ immaturity includes their strife (*eris*, 1 Cor 1:11; 3:3) and jealousy (*zēlos*, 1 Cor 3:3). The vices listed by Paul involve the self-indulgence, selfish ambition, and self-centeredness that destroy corporate formation.

The Positive Side. These vices provide the sharp contrast to the positive dimensions of spiritual formation. In Galatians, Christ is “formed” (4:19) among the believers as they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (5:22), the alternative to the “works of the flesh” (5:19). At the head of the list is love (*agapē*), which develops the earlier exhortation to “be slaves to one another through love” (5:14). *Agapē* provides the orientation for understanding the other attributes, which elaborate on the meaning of love toward others within the community.

As Paul’s prayers for the formation indicate (see above), the central aspect of spiritual formation is love (cf. Phil 1:9–11; 1 Thess 3:11–13). Indeed, the most frequent moral attribute in his descriptions of spiritual formation is love. The prayers also indicate that love is not a static concept, for Paul can both express gratitude for a community’s “labor of love” (1 Thess 1:3) and pray that they “increase and abound in love” (1 Thess 3:2). His prayer for the Philippians suggests that believers learn to love “with full knowledge and discernment” (Phil 1:9). The absence of a reference to the objects of love

suggests that formation involves developing a sensitivity and insight on the nature of love (*aisthēsis*).

Paul never speaks in generic terms of love for humankind (*philanthrōpia*), but maintains the focus on love within the new family. The neighbor in the Levitical command “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18) is the sibling in the house church (cf. Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14). Believers express love when they take on the roles of family members to protect and provide the social safety net that ancient families provided. This familial role becomes evident in the extended ethical exhortation in Rom 12:1–15:13. After Paul indicates that spiritual formation (Rom 12:2) involves participation in the body (12:3–8), he describes the believers’ relationship to insiders (12:9–16; 13:8–13; 14:1–15:13) and outsiders (12:17–13:7). Love involves providing affection (12:9), social welfare (12:13), a sharing of joy and sorrow (12:15), and a unity of purpose (12:16). Believers also assume the role of family members in which the strong ensure that the weak do not fall (14:1–15:13). This concern is an expression of love (14:15).

At the heart of Paul’s understanding of love is that believers abandon self-seeking and place the needs of others above their own. “No one lives to himself and no one dies to himself” (Rom 14:7; 2 Cor 5:15). Believers do not please themselves, but bear the burdens of others (Rom 15:1,2; Gal 6:1,2). As in Galatians, Paul contrasts the self-seeking that destroys community life (Phil 2:3) with the humility involved in “counting others better than [ourselves],” as we look to the needs of others (Phil 2:4).

Spiritual formation, therefore, is a continuing process in which we learn to abandon self-absorption and to seek the good of others. Paul assumes that the pursuit of self-interest is the natural human condition and that those who are involved in jealousy and strife (cf. 1 Cor 3:1–3) have not made progress toward spiritual maturation. He envisions communities where the construction of the whole community takes precedence over the desires of individual members (1 Cor 14:1–5). He also envisions communities in which the good

of the whole community is more important than the individual rights of the members (1 Cor 8:1–11:1).

Models of Spiritual Formation

When Paul urges the Philippians to count others better than themselves (2:4), he adds, “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5) before narrating the story of the incarnation and exaltation of Jesus (Phil 2:6–11) in what scholars call the “Philippian hymn.” This story is the ultimate account of formation, for it begins with the one who was “in the form (*morphē*) of God” at the beginning before emptying himself, “taking on the form (*morphē*) of a slave” (2:6,7) and humbling himself at the cross (2:8). As a result, God “highly exalted” him (2:9–11).

Paul appeals to his converts to identify with the story, indicating that their ultimate formation into his image follows (cf. Phil 3:20) the path of self-denial. Elsewhere he indicates that believers share the cross, not only at baptism (Rom 6:4), but also in their whole existence. Paul declares to the Corinthians, “One died for all. Therefore all died” (2 Cor 5:14). When he encourages the Romans not to please themselves, he adds, “For Christ did not please himself” (Rom 15:3).

Paul frequently presents himself as the model of spiritual formation. He not only encourages the Philippians to follow the model of Christ, but also presents himself as an example. Like Jesus Christ, Paul gave up privileges (Phil 3:2–6) and shared in the sufferings of Christ, “being conformed (*summorphizomenos*) to his death.” Like the readers, he has not reached the goal (3:12), but he continues the path of spiritual formation, calling on the converts to imitate his example (Phil 3:17). Similarly, when the Corinthians engage in self-serving behavior (1 Cor 8:1–13), Paul presents himself as the model of the sacrifice of his rights (1 Cor 9), concluding, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Conclusion

As the one who gave us the terminology of spiritual formation, Paul also provides clarity on the meaning of the concept. He envisions the transformation of communities from self-serving behavior to loving conduct that is shaped by the cross. The self-denying love demonstrated by Jesus at the cross is the foundation of the believers' moral life and communal existence. Believers who will ultimately be "conformed to the image" of the victorious Son (Rom 8:29) are now being conformed to the one who emptied himself. Only by radical love can communities grow together into his image.

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Beyond the “Image of God” Conundrum: A Relational View of Human Dignity

Ron Highfield

When Christians attempt to defend human dignity, our instinctive reaction is to assert that human beings are created in the “image of God.” The term “image of God” is found only six times in the Bible, three times in reference to human beings (Gen 1:26,27 and 9:6) and three times in reference to Christ (Col 1:15; 3:10; and 2 Cor 4:4). Genesis 1:27 asserts that human beings were created in the image of God but does not draw any explicit implications for human dignity. Implicitly, however, humans are differentiated from the other creatures by their special status and mission. Genesis 9:6 declares explicitly the connection between respect for human life and the image of God. Murder must be punished harshly because “God made man in his image.”

Though Genesis is clear that human beings possess special dignity because they are created in the image of God, the Bible never explains what it means to be the image of God. However, there is a tendency in the history of Christian thought to locate the image of God in certain qualities that differentiate humanity from the animals and that enable human beings to rule over the rest of creation: specifically, reason and free will. As far as I can tell, most writers lost sight of the relational character of the image of God. An image in a mirror exists only in relation to the original, in a dynamic relationship to the thing of which it is the image.

The problem I want to address in this essay is this: when we lose sight of the relational character of human dignity and instead focus on the inherent

attributes of reason and free will, we make ourselves vulnerable to two critiques. The first is that human dignity rests in inherent properties that remain the same whether God exists or not. So, being in relation to God has nothing to do with human dignity. This is a theological disaster. Second, if human dignity rests in qualities that can be quantified, it becomes thinkable that some human beings possess more dignity than others, which is a moral catastrophe. Sadly, our contemporary moral culture is determined by these two calamities.

The Contemporary View of Human Dignity

A new understanding of human dignity began to gain dominance in Western thought during the Renaissance.¹ Typical of this shift is Pico Mirandola's essay, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Whereas Mirandola still thinks of humanity as a divine creation and uses the incarnation as proof of human dignity, he prepares the way for those who would assert human dignity independently of a theological foundation. Mirandola speaks of human beings "as the most fortunate of creatures and as a result worthy of highest admiration." Putting words into the mouth of the creator, Mirandola praises human beings:

We have given thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits for thyself. . . . Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, are the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine.

¹ See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995), 179–199. In these pages Trinkaus surveys patristic and medieval thinkers' views on human dignity. While thinkers of these periods were aware of the "misery" of humanity, they extolled the dignity bestowed on humanity by the Creator.

O great liberality of God the Father! O great and wonderful happiness of man! It is given him to have that which he chooses and be that which he wills.²

Moving into the enlightenment era, we hear a thoroughly modern understanding of dignity. For Descartes, freedom is the power to rule oneself as one chooses:

Now freewill is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects; and so its rightful use is the greatest of all goods we possess, and further there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but freewill can produce our greatest contentment.³

Even in his romantic rebellion against the cold rationalism of the enlightenment Rousseau maintained the modern view of human dignity:

Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal voice from heaven; sure guide for a creature ignorant and finite indeed, yet intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and evil, making man like to God! In thee consists the excellence of man’s nature and the morality of his actions.⁴

Perhaps the most influential proponent of autonomy-based dignity is the champion of enlightenment, Immanuel Kant. According to Kant, “autonomy is the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational creature.”⁵ Kant reverses the classic relationship between God and dignity. We do not have dignity *because* of our relationship to God; to the contrary, God must judge us worthy because of our inherent dignity. With an explicit rejection of the relational view of dignity, Kant pronounces: “The essence of things is not

² *Pico Della Mirandola: On the Dignity of Man and Other Essays*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis et. al. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 4f. For a thorough study of Mirandola in the context of Italian humanism, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 505–526.

³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 147; quoted from a letter of Descartes.

⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 358.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), 41.

altered by their external relations; and whatever without reference to such relations alone constitutes the absolute worth of man is also what he must be judged by, whoever the judge may be, even the Supreme Being.”⁶

Contemporary secular discussions of human dignity—for example, *The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* and *The Charter of Fundamental Rights of The European Union (2000)*—omit reference to a transcendent ground and hence give the impression of mere assertions without foundation. Most of our contemporaries understand their dignity as rooted in qualities intrinsic to their persons, in their autonomy or feelings of self-worth or unique individuality. They cannot conceive of their dignity as rooted in something extrinsic, even in God.

Dignity in the Church Fathers and Medieval Theology

The church fathers and medieval theologians reflect extensively on the dignity and misery of humanity. They understand human dignity in three distinct but related ways: as excellence of nature, as moral excellence and as belovedness. The excellent qualities of human beings set them above all other earthly creatures. Such excellence bestows power and authority to rule other creatures. In a fallen world, however, humanity does not live up to its noble birth. It misuses its excellent qualities to engage in degrading behavior. But with the aid of divine grace human beings can regain some moral excellence in their lives. Human beings cannot take credit for their excellent qualities and actions; rather, these are gracious gifts of God their creator. Humanity’s status of greater dignity in relation to other creatures is derivative of the love and favor with which God relates to them. Hence the relationship of being loved and favored by God is the more fundamental basis of human dignity. Excellence of nature, though in a sense inherent in humanity, is measured in comparison with other creatures. Belovedness, in contrast, is not a quality inherent in humanity but a relationship with God, eccentric to our being.

⁶ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 44. I shall argue the opposite.

In his commentary on Gen 1:26, concerning the creation of humanity in the “image and likeness of God,” Augustine finds humanity’s highest dignity in the reasoning function of the soul. Reason enables human beings to rule over the earth as God rules over all things and enables humanity to contemplate God. The capacity to contemplate God is outwardly symbolized by man’s erect posture.⁷ Though Augustine was the most influential theologian in the West, others also wrote on the dignity of humanity. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395) wrote *On the Creation of Man* in which he extolled the excellences of humanity. According to Gregory, it is clear that God made humankind for the exercise of kingly rule; for “the soul immediately shows its royal and exalted character, far removed as it is from the lowliness of private station, in that it owns no lord, and is self-governed, swayed autocratically by its own will; for to whom else does this belong than to a king?”⁸ The greatness of humanity consists not in being an image of the world but “in his being in the image of the nature of the creator.”⁹ Since God is the good beyond all good we can conceive, Gregory argues that being in the image of God indicates we are created to participate in all the best things:

Thus there is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing that we conceive: but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but have decision in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and cannot be virtue.¹⁰

The apologetic writer Lactantius (ca. 250–325) wrote *On the Workmanship of God or the Formation of Man* as an attempt to prove the existence of

⁷ Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, 17 and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, 16; See *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 84, trans and ed. Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 74–76 and 182–188

⁸ *On the Making of Man*, 4.1; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF) 2, vol 5, Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 50.

⁹ *On the Making of Man*, 16.2; NPNF 2 vol. 5, 63.

¹⁰ *On the Making of Man*, 16.111; NPNF 2 vol. 5, 64.

God by showing the greatness of his human creation. Critics charge that the weakness and vulnerability of humanity in comparison to the other animals counts against divine providence. Lactantius replies that God gave man reason and wisdom, excellences that show “that we are descended from Him, because he himself is intelligence.”¹¹ Reason gives humanity the power to rule the animals and provide for itself far better than the animals. The beauty of his body is enhanced by the absence of fur and sharp teeth and claws.

One other patristic writer deserves mention, Nemesius of Emesa (ca. 390), who wrote *On Human Nature*. He writes, “When we consider these facts about man, how can we exaggerate the dignity of his place in the creation?” Humankind’s greatness is inexpressible:

Who, then, can fully express the pre-eminence of so singular a creature? Man crosses the mighty deep, contemplates the range of the heavens, notes the motion, position, and size of the stars, and reaps a harvest both from land and sea, scorning the rage of wild beasts and the might of whales. He learns all kinds of knowledge, gains skill in arts, and pursues scientific inquiry. By writing, he addresses himself to whom he will, however far away, unhindered by bodily location. He foretells the future, rules everything, subdues everything, enjoys everything. He converses with angels and with God himself. He gives orders to creation. Devils are subject to him. He explores the nature of every kind of being. He busies himself with the knowing of God, and is God’s house and temple. And all these privileges he is able to purchase at the cost of virtue and godliness.¹²

Theologians of the middle ages inherited the ideas of Augustine, Gregory, Nemesius and others. Among other things, they reflected on the question of whether human beings possess more or less dignity than angels. The conclusion was that human beings possessed less. In this era there were many more treatises written on the misery of humanity than on its dignity. But near the end of the Middle Ages, at the beginning of the Renaissance,

¹¹ *On the Workmanship of God*, 2, William Fletcher trans. and ed.; *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF), vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 282.

¹² William Telfer, ed., *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 254f.

Petrarch (1304–1374) wrote about the dignity of the human condition. Remaining solidly within the Christian tradition on the subject, he anticipates later humanists’ positive estimation of human nature and condition:

And what surpasses all dignity, not only human but angelic, humanity itself is so conjoined to divinity that He who was God is become man . . . so that He makes man God . . . But what, I pray, can man, I do not say hope, but choose, but think that is higher than that he should become God? Behold, now he is God. What now remains, I ask, toward which your prayers aspire? Nothing greater is left to be found or even imagined . . . He assumed nothing other, although he was able, than a human body and a human soul, nor did He wish to be ascribed to the angelic species but the human so that you might know and rejoice at how much your Lord loved you.¹³

As I adumbrated at the beginning of this section, traditional Christian thinkers understood human dignity as excellence of nature or moral excellence or belovedness. As this summary shows, humanity’s excellence of being, though it can inspire awe, is finite. We can conceive of more excellent beings. The issue of moral excellence (or its lack) offers for most writers merely an opportunity to lament the sin and misery and degeneracy of fallen humanity. Dignity of this sort is in short supply. However, the dignity of belovedness offers some exciting possibilities, which were hinted at in Petrarch. Being loved by God bestows a dignity on us that far surpasses the excellence of our nature or of our moral performance.¹⁴ It is potentially infinite. I will develop this possibility below.

¹³ Quoted in Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 191.

¹⁴ Christoph Schöbel argues that the church should “criticize all views of what it means to be human . . . which define human dignity on the basis of observable attributes based on the capacities of human nature that humans may possess to a greater or lesser degree.” [“Recovering Human Dignity,” in *God and Human Dignity*, R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 57]. While I share Schöbel’s concern with defending the human dignity of the aged, the preborn, and other “unproductive” people, it is also important to recognize the dignity of human nature itself and of moral character. But the church fathers and medieval theologians include excellence of nature and moral excellence among the marks of human dignity for important reasons. Consider for example how human

Dignity and Belovedness

The English word “dignity” still retains overtones of the Latin words *dignus* (worthy) or *dignitas* (merit or worth).¹⁵ It is important to remember that dignity is the measure of our worth and is therefore a relative term. Worth is a kind of relation. Something is “worth” something because it is worth something to someone. We can prize gold because of its purchasing power or for its beauty, as a means or as an end. It should be clear that a means is always subordinate to its end. Indeed, the value of a means is totally wrapped up in the value of its end: hammers are valuable because houses are more valuable. We are given a higher dignity if we are valued as ends than if we are valued as means to other ends. But to be valued as an end is to be *loved*. Hence, the highest dignity we can bestow on another person is love.

Human love cannot serve as a secure foundation for human dignity, however, for human love is unreliable and far from universal. We cannot be satisfied with a human dignity that rises and falls with others’ feelings about us.¹⁶ Thus it does not make sense to think we *bestow* dignity on one another by loving each other. Rather, we must understand human dignity as a quality in others that should be *recognized*, not merely bestowed or withheld. Dignity must thus be, in a sense not yet defined, *inherent* in human beings. But the concept of “inherent” dignity—the idea that humans have “worth” apart from relationships in which they are valued—is plagued with conceptual problems. Dignity is a relationship, and you cannot possess a relationship alone.

dignity is distinguished from that of “lower” animals. Perhaps God loves all living things. Does this mean that squirrels possess a dignity equal to humans? Human beings possess qualities that mark them as superior to other animals, and these superior qualities are at least signs of a higher dignity before God.

¹⁵ In Greek the idea of dignity is expressed by *to axiōma* (worth, dignity or weight) and *hē timē* (honor, respect, recognition).

¹⁶ Unless we understand dignity as conferred by God “then dignity becomes something that is conferred or withheld by other finite entities . . . If it is constituted in this way, however, it can also be denied and destroyed in this way” [Christoph Schöbel, “Recovering Human Dignity,” 53].

Human dignity needs a foundation that is unchanging, universal, *and* relational. This foundation can be secured only in God’s love for us.¹⁷

Human Dignity as a Relation to God. God’s very being is relational, for God *is* Father, Son, and Spirit. The love among the three is eternal, constant, and total. By loving, each bestows on the other infinite dignity. God’s dignity, therefore, is both inherent and relational. It is inherent because it is an essential aspect of God’s eternal nature. God *is* love! The love among the Trinity is a feature of what it means to be God. It is relational because God has been esteemed worthy from all eternity. God (as Trinity) is the foundation and origin for his own dignity—and hence for the dignity of all other things. God does not love his dear children because of their inherent dignity or moral excellence. He *bestows* dignity on them by loving them, the dignity of belovedness.

Does our dignity-relation to God impose obligations on human beings to recognize each other’s dignity? Most certainly it does. Consider the parallel between our existence and our dignity. We exist because God loves us and wills our existence. Existence, too, is a relation to our creator. Yet because we exist before God, we exist also before each other—as an objective fact. Other people don’t exist because we want them to exist. In the same way, even though our dignity is a relation to God, it is also a reality for all human beings. God’s love for his dear children creates a *real* dignity-relation. We must recognize human dignity as relationally inherent in our fellow human beings; that is, each and every human being exists and possesses a dignity

¹⁷ “Only God the creator can crown with glory and honour; creatures are not competent to ascribe dignity to themselves or to other creatures . . . And because it is rooted in God’s free favour alone, creaturely dignity is secure” (John Webster, “The Dignity of Creatures,” in Paul Middleton, ed., *The God of Love and Human Dignity: Festschrift for George Newlands* [New York: T & T Clark, 2007], 24). In this fine essay, though he expresses himself in different terms, Webster clearly works with what I call the relational view of dignity or belovedness. He speaks of dignity in terms of divine “blessing” (21), “loving act of God” (22), “gift of God” (23), “divine gift” (23), God’s “acknowledging and approving” (24), God’s “free favour” (24), “fellowship” with God (25), and a “relation” to God (25).

bestowed by God. They are worthy of our love because God loves them. Their worth precedes our love because God's love precedes their worth.

How Great a Dignity? We've established that our dignity derives from God's love for us. Now we can ask about the quality of this dignity. If dignity is a relation of being loved, and God's love for us is the only constant and universal love, then our God-bestowed dignity is the highest dignity possible for us. Further, since God is the greatest possible being and his love is the greatest possible love, *the dignity it bestows is the greatest possible dignity*. Paul prays that we "may have power . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:18,19). John directly connects God's great love of us to our dignity: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). Clearly John thinks there is no greater dignity possible for us than to be given the status of God's dear children.

So, God bestows on us the highest dignity possible for us creatures. But I want to push this even further to argue that God's love for us gives us a dignity higher than we can imagine or conceive. As we approach this issue it is very important to keep in mind the three different ways human beings are said to possess dignity: as excellence of nature, as moral excellence and as belovedness. Clearly, God's nature and moral life are infinitely more excellent than our nature and moral lives. It is impossible to equal God in the dignity of attributes or powers. As the word *excel*-ence indicates, excellence in nature or life is measured comparatively. And in comparison with God we are nothing. Hence, as long as we think of dignity as the quality of our nature or life, we must think of our worth as less than God's worth. But this issue does not arise when we think of our dignity as our belovedness. Developing this third understanding of human dignity, I want to suggest a radical idea: God bestows on us the same dignity that he bestows on himself, for God loves us no less than he loves himself. The Father loves us with the *very*

same love with which he loves his beloved Son. No higher dignity can be imagined or conceived. Making this suggestion credible will require some explanation.

As I showed above, our dignity is founded on God’s love for us.¹⁸ Our dignity and God’s dignity thus have the same ground: the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. But someone may say, surely the Father does not love us *as much* as he loves his Son, or the Son his Father. On the contrary, the central thrust of the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and atonement is precisely that the Father loves us exactly as much as he loves his Son. Becoming incarnate, he became one of us and took up our nature. This one man *is* God’s eternal Son, and the Father loves him with an eternal love. Hence, the Father bestows on this human being the same dignity in time that the Father, Son, and Spirit bestow on each other eternally.

The doctrine of the atonement makes clear that the divine dignity bestowed on Jesus is a possibility for all human beings. Paul places this truth at the center of his gospel: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). The Son of God “loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1,2). In doing this, he counted us worthy of his love. The principle of the atonement is: what the one does all do or what happens to the one happens to all or what the one is all become. The Father relates to us as he relates to his own dear Son, and that is why we are his dear children.

We know that God loves us no less than he loves himself, because he does not love us for what we are. His love for us is grounded in his own life,

¹⁸ For a similar view, see Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), 94: “The dignity of human personality is not grounded in an abstract, general element in all men, namely reason, but individual personality as such is the object of this appreciation because it is deemed worthy of being called by God. Only the personal God can fundamentally establish truly personal existence and responsibility . . . The love of the personal God does not create an abstract, impersonal humanity; it calls the individual to the most personal responsibility.” Quoted in Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why it Is Tempting to Live as if God Doesn’t Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 176.

in the Father's love for the Son in the Spirit. The Father does not love his human children less because they are not his equal. God loves us just like, and just as much, as he loves himself. Even though we were by nature nothing, by deeds sinners, and by affections enemies, God loved us. There is and can be no higher dignity. It is beyond our wildest imagination, transcending all our conceptual powers.

Baptism and The Moral Life

Everett Ferguson

Karl Barth, the great twentieth-century Reformed theologian, found the Biblical and theological grounds for infant baptism wanting. Although he opposed any rebaptism (on the grounds of the objective working of God in spite of any irregularities), he had these significant things to say:

Baptism without the willingness and readiness of the baptized is true, effectual and effective baptism, but it is not correct; it is not done in obedience, it is not administered according to proper order, and therefore it is necessarily clouded baptism. . . .

Neither by exegesis nor from the nature of the case can it be established that the baptized person can be a merely passive instrument (*Behandelter*). Rather it may be shown, by exegesis and from the nature of the case, that in this action the baptized is an active partner (*Handelnder*) and that at whatever stage of life he may be, plainly no *infans* can be such a person. . . .

In the sphere of the New Testament one is not brought to baptism; one comes to baptism. . . .

[O]ne can hardly come to any other conclusion but that the case for a New Testament proof of infant-baptism is more than weak.

From the standpoint of a doctrine of baptism, infant-baptism can hardly be preserved without exegetical and practical artifices and sophisms—the proof to the contrary has yet to be supplied. One wants to preserve it only if one is resolved to do so on grounds

which lie outside the biblical passages on baptism and outside the thing itself. . . .

Then Barth comes to the core of the problem in Europe:

If she were to break with infant-baptism, the Church would not easily any longer be a people's church in the sense of a state Church or a church of the masses.¹

Barth had seen the effects infant baptism had on the State churches in Europe, one effect being a non-committed membership.

Infant baptism does not have to have this effect. Some groups have kept a committed membership with infant baptism, and many individuals baptized as infants have grown into faithful Christians. On the other hand, churches which practice believers baptism have not always been successful in maintaining a committed membership.

The Anabaptists of the Reformation and their successors saw the connection between believers baptism and discipleship. This connection was contradicted by a church in which everyone in a society was a member. Franklin Littell described their views this way:

The promiscuous use of the rite [of baptism] to bring into the Great Church all kinds of pagans without inner reformation indicated the "Fall." When this happened the moral life of the community blended with that of the world. . . . The corruption of the church was precisely this: that she took in masses of people who had no understanding of what the Gospel meant . . . and then completed the compromise in later centuries by taking in generation after generation of children who had not reached the age of

¹ Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, trans. Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), 40, 41, 42, 45, 49, 52–53. More recently, historians and theologians in the Reformed tradition have found the historical basis for infant baptism deficient. Examples of this research include the late David F. Wright (Church of Scotland), *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism? An Enquiry at the End of Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005); *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2007); and H. F. Stander and J. P. Louw (Dutch Reformed) *Baptism in the Early Church* (Pretoria: Didaskalia, 1988).

understanding. “For a Christian life is no child’s play,” but a matter calling for stern discipline and vigorous ethical living.²

As these reformers clearly saw, the New Testament presents a close relationship between baptism and the Christian life.

N. T. Wright’s recent book on Christian ethics, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*, contrasts the New Testament approach to ethics with the views that ethics are a matter of obeying the rules or a matter of being true to the deepest longings of one’s heart (or “doing what comes naturally”). The approach of Jesus and the early Christians involved a transformation of character.³ Wright says little about the connection of baptism with this transformation.⁴ However, the New Testament, especially the Pauline letters, presents an intimate connection.

Believers Baptism in Paul’s Epistles

I offer here a study of the meaning of believers baptism for the life of the church by examining Paul’s rich theology of baptism.⁵ First of all, it is important to remember that references to baptism are in letters addressed to those already baptized. Paul appeals to the meaning of baptism as a shared basis for drawing conclusions about Christian conduct and the life of the church.

Romans 6:1–12

Romans 6 is the showcase example of the connection Paul makes between baptism and the Christian moral life.

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sins in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to

² Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 70.

³ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), *passim*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 280–282.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 146–165.

sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again: death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sins, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey your passions.

In the preceding chapters of Romans Paul has charged all, both Jews and Gentiles, as being under sin (Rom 3:23). The answer to sin was not the law, for it could only reveal sin (Rom 3:20), but could not give the power to keep its requirements. God's answer to the human dilemma was putting forward Christ as a sacrifice of atonement (Rom 3:25). Both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith (Rom 3:28–30), as exemplified by Abraham (Rom 4). God's grace thus triumphed over sin and the law (Rom 5:15–19). As sin increased, grace super-abounded (Rom 5:20,21).

This gospel of grace naturally led to the question, real or hypothetical, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1). Paul's immediate response is "Perish the thought!" (Rom 6:2). His reasoned answer to the objection is that the meaning of baptism refutes the idea that grace means one can sin so grace can abound.

The answer is bound up with the centrality of Christology for Paul. At the heart of his Christology was the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the death and resurrection of Christ that give meaning to baptism. Baptism into

Christ is a baptism into his death. Baptism brings one into Christ's death, which effects atonement. The baptized person, therefore, has died to sin. The old self has been crucified. If one has died to sin, that person cannot go on living in sin. Paul does not address the problem that the baptized person may fall again into sin, because he or she has not actually died. So Paul says, "You must consider yourself dead to sin" (Rom 6:11).

For Paul, the resurrection of Christ is of equal, or greater, importance with his death. Hence, the one baptized into him is united also with his resurrection life. That means the baptized person is raised to walk in newness of life and is alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:4, 11). This new life anticipates the future resurrection (Rom 6:5, 8). The qualities of this new life are described in chapters 8 (one is now under the Spirit, not under sin nor under law) and 12–15 (life as a living sacrifice).

Implicit in the text is that the baptized person is of responsible age. This person can die to sin. Newness of life begins with baptism and not sometime later in one's life. Baptism, because of its connection with the death and resurrection of Christ, sets the character of one's conduct—rejecting sin and living a life in Christ.

Colossians 2:11–15

Colossians 2 makes explicit the connection of faith with baptism that is implicit in Rom 6.⁶

In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision [made without hands], by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ: when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He dis-

⁶ In Rom 10:8–11 Paul does connect the (baptismal) faith in the heart and confession with the lips with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

armed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

There is a question whether “the circumcision of Christ” refers to his death, a stripping away of his flesh, in which one participates at baptism, or is something done by Christ to the one baptized. I incline to the former view, but either way Paul employs circumcision language in connection with baptism. That has led to the view that baptism is the Christian equivalent of circumcision in the Old Testament. But that interpretation would be incorrect. The circumcision in this passage is done “without hands.” It stands in contrast to physical circumcision, and is also inapplicable to baptism. Rather than being parallel to baptism, circumcision is something done in baptism.

In baptism one identifies with the death of Christ. Also, more explicitly than Rom 6, baptism is a resurrection with Christ. The act of baptism is an expression of faith in the power of God, specifically in his power in raising Christ from the dead.

This significance of baptism, namely faith in the resurrection of Christ, is possible and meaningful only to one of responsible age. That person was previously dead in trespasses but is now made alive with Christ, because the trespasses are forgiven and the record of their debt was cancelled, being nailed to the cross (Col 2:13,14). Because of what God has done, the person can now live victoriously (Col 2:15).

The passage functions in Colossians as a corrective to erroneous views that denigrated Christ in comparison with other heavenly powers, or supplemented faith in him with such powers. The context emphasizes the superiority of Christ (Col 2:9,10). The all sufficiency of what God has done through him makes unnecessary the rituals promoted by the errorists (Col 2:16–23). What is especially relevant for this essay is the way the baptismal language of Col 2:12, of being buried with Christ and raised with him, is picked up in the subsequent moral instruction. “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?” (Col 2:20). “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are

above, where Christ is” (Col 3:1). “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly” (Col 3:5). The significance of baptism determines the attitudes and conduct of the baptized.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Some in Corinth had been guilty of serious social sins.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be (1 Cor 6:9–11a).

However, they had been changed:

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11b).

This passage highlights the dramatic moral change which should occur after becoming a Christian. The main features of early Christian understanding of baptism are here: a cleansing, invoking the name of Christ (in whose name the baptism was done and perhaps specifically referring to the faith confessed at baptism—cf. Acts 22:16), and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Being “washed, sanctified, and justified” meant certain conduct was now ruled out. The Holy Spirit given in baptism made the body a temple (1 Cor 6:19), not to be used for sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:13–18). One is no longer one’s own, for the Lord bought the person with a price (1 Cor 6:20). Baptism made its recipients members of Christ (1 Cor 6:15), which reminds us of Rom 6:3 and prepares for 1 Cor 12.

1 Corinthians 12:12,13

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in [by] the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Baptism incorporates one into the church, “the body of Christ.” Baptism is, therefore, central to the unity of the church (cf. Eph 4:4–6). Diversity of race and economic status is overcome in this new social reality. Oneness in Christ is consistent with diversity of members, as in a human physical body (1 Cor 12:14, 27). The one divine Spirit introduces the baptized into the one body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13a). The last phrase may be translated either “be given to drink” or “be watered or irrigated” (1 Cor 12:13b). Either metaphor would refer to reception of the Holy Spirit and his refreshing presence in the life of the baptized in addition to his action in incorporating one into Christ. Baptism becomes significant for how Christians regard one another in the united body of Christ (1 Cor 12:14–26).

Galatians 3:26–29

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26–29).

This passage introduces another metaphor. Not only is one baptized into Christ and thus becomes a member of Christ, but that person is also clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27). The oneness is extended from race and economic status to include the sexual distinction of male and female. All have equal access to the covenant of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Indeed that is the point of the passage. The church does not live under the Mosaic law (Gal 3:10–25); it is no longer subject to its tutelage but now lives as sons of God (Gal 3:23–26). Through faith those who are baptized into Christ are incorporated into him and so share his sonship (Gal 3:26,27). Having become sons, they receive the Spirit (Gal 4:6).

This passage is important because it shows the association of faith and baptism: faith as the basis of sonship and baptism as the occasion of becoming God’s children (Gal 3:26,27). In the larger context of Galatians baptism

marks a change of status so that one does not live as a slave to the Law but as a freeborn child he or she lives by the Spirit of sonship (Gal 5).

Ephesians 5:25–27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by [with] the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

Paul uses the relationship of Christ and the church as the standard for the relationship of husbands and wives. He refers to the custom of a wedding bath before the exchange of vows. On that analogy, the bath or washing⁷ is baptism and “the word” would likely be the accompanying confession of faith by which one pledged fidelity to Christ. The purpose of the cleansing by water and the word is to produce a holy, unblemished church. As is the husband’s desire for his wife, so is Christ’s desire for his church. Baptism is once more linked to a high standard of moral purity—without stain or blemish, holy and blameless.

Titus 3:3–7

Titus also uses the word for bath or washing in reference to baptism.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water [washing] of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Again, we find a contrast of the past and present but with a different kind of vice list from that in 1 Cor 6. This list has more to do with characteristics

⁷ A word often used in early Christian literature for baptism.

and attitudes than with specific activities. And again, the passage has to do with those old enough to have experienced sin.

The word for regeneration (*palingenesia*) is different from the word for rebirth (*anagennēsis*), which in the verb form occurs in 1 Pet 1:3, 23 (cf. John 3:3), and was used in reference to a new world or new age (Matt 19:28). Baptism is the cleansing from the old manner of life, a cleansing that is related to the end-time and effected by the Holy Spirit's renewal. This washing has a present purpose, for believers in God are to dedicate themselves to good works (Titus 3:8).

Summary

Baptism according to Paul is closely related to the moral life. Believers baptism has a central significance for the life of the church.

The church is those who live a new life as slaves of righteousness (Rom 6), who live victorious over sin (Col 2:11–15), who constitute a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:9–20), who are a unity in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–27), who are heirs of the covenant of Abraham and live by his faith (Gal 3:23–29), who are a holy and glorious people (Eph 5:26–28), and who practice good deeds (Titus 3:3–8). Such is the significance of believers baptism for the moral life of the church.

We would do well to emphasize the moral dimension of baptism along with its true doctrinal meaning in our evangelistic preaching, in our teaching to converts before and after baptism, and in our instruction to the church. Such would perhaps alleviate some of the push to de-emphasize the saving significance of baptism and diminish the number of those who, after their baptism, drift away from the church.

“The Sacrifice of Praise”
Strengthening Congregational Singing*

Jeffrey Peterson

The death of Mitch Miller last year serves as a reminder that, to whatever extent it once was, ours is no longer a singalong society. I’m not sure just when the change came, but it must have been sometime between 1984 and 1998—between the last football game I attended in college and the first varsity basketball game I attended at my children’s school. In the olden days, the game began with the spectators standing and singing the national anthem; now we stand and listen while someone else sings. I made this discovery amidst some mild embarrassment in the fall of 1998, when I joined that evening’s performer in a duet for the first few bars before noticing that I was the only spectator singing. Americans are in the habit of *listening* to music almost everywhere, but birthday parties and meetings of the more overtly patriotic chapters of the Rotary Club are about the only occasions where we still routinely *sing* in groups outside a church building. It is within this cultural

*I offer these reflections in appreciation of Allan McNicol, whose work is marked by a concern to preserve and refine the Restorationist vision in dialogue with current scriptural and theological scholarship. I wish also hereby to honor Patricia McNicol, whose ministry as director of the Children’s Chorus at the University Avenue Church of Christ in Austin was a blessing to my children. This essay incorporates remarks delivered at the Pepperdine Bible Lectures, May 6, 2005. I am grateful to Ross Thomson, pulpit minister of the Singing Oaks Church of Christ in Denton, Texas, for comment on the penultimate draft.

milieu that Churches of Christ are reconsidering our longstanding practice of *a cappella* congregational singing.

A friend who teaches at a Christian university relates an anecdote that highlights another concern regarding the singing of our congregations. He was leading a study tour in Germany which included a visit to Wittenberg, where Martin Luther struck the spark that ignited the Reformation by nailing 95 debate propositions to the cathedral door (as intellectuals spoiling for a fight did before the invention of blogs). As the tour bus departed, my friend suggested to the group's song leader that it would be appropriate to sing Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress." "I'm sorry," the student replied, "I don't think I know that one." A show of hands confirmed the same for all but a few of these students, most brought up in Churches of Christ. Are our churches missing anything vital if we are unable to sing the great, theologically substantive hymns of the Christian tradition and can praise God only through simple and repetitive praise choruses? And if so, will this loss be hastened or slowed if the praise team becomes a praise band?

I do not believe that the question whether Churches of Christ will continue to sing *a cappella* is the most important question facing our fellowship, and I think the question of what we sing is more important. But the question whether to continue to sing *a cappella* is one of the most *urgent* questions facing our churches; the Latin *urgere* means "to press hard, urge," and for many of our churches, the question is inescapable. Every group of Christians meeting together must of necessity decide how to order their common life. Concretely, this includes doing some things in assemblies and not doing others, and doing each of those things in some way rather than another—at least, on each occasion when a given thing is done. (To seek to be as eclectic as possible and vary worship practices as much as we can from one service to another would itself be to adopt a way of being the church, even if not an advisable one.) In the current cultural climate, churches of the Restoration tradition must decide whether to maintain worship *a cappella* or to adopt a

different practice. That decision will face urban and suburban churches repeatedly within the next decade.

Yet the future of *a cappella* singing is a difficult question to consider dispassionately. The practice was a key element of our churches’ identity throughout the twentieth century, an identifying mark recognized by insiders and outsiders. For much of the twentieth century, Churches of Christ appeared to outsiders as either “the people who worship without instruments” (or “without music,” as sometimes said) or “the people who think they’re the only ones going to heaven,” and sometimes a combination of the two. Indeed, not a few insiders thought that one reason we were the only ones going to heaven had to do with the absence of instruments in our worship.¹

So we come to this discussion carrying some baggage that’s liable to weigh us down when we try to think it through. Perhaps the heaviest of these burdens is the history of sectarianism to which I’ve just alluded. For much of the last century, many of our churches operated under the assumption that any time we take up any doctrinal question, what is at stake is our ability to remain in fellowship with those who reach a different conclusion (and, ultimately, the eternal salvation of the party in error). Second, and related, is the background of legalism. We have often engaged questions of church doctrine and practice on the tacit assumption that the New Testament is akin to the IRS Code, and we have cast our divine Judge in the role of cosmic Auditor: when judgment comes, God will put on his green eyeshades and go to work looking for a technicality on which to deny us eternal life. That is far from the New Testament gospel of a God who has gone to all lengths to save his errant creatures, even giving up his Son for us.

Third, we approach this question weighed down by the burden of bad arguments. This is related to legalism, but it’s a distinct problem. We bring to the question of church music a history of some embarrassingly weak argu-

¹ An informative and engaging account of Churches of Christ in the last century, amply illustrating this point, is David Edwin Harrell’s *Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey’s Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000).

ments for the practice of *a cappella* singing. Mike Cope has said that as a child he knew that instrumental music was wrong; he wasn't sure why, but he knew it had "something do with gopher wood." It's not an unmixed blessing that Nadab and Abihu are better known in our fellowship than in other sectors of Christendom.² This history means that when we talk about the music of the church, we have to overcome embarrassment that we're discussing the subject at all or that there are in fact issues requiring discussion. This is related to the fourth piece of baggage we're toting, which we've only picked up within the last decade or two and which might be called the Doctrine of Ecclesiological Indifferentism. This is the judgment that it really does not matter much what the church does when we come together; having understandably wearied of sectarianism and legalism as a basis for life together, we are pulled to the opposite extreme by the swing of the pendulum. When a practice previously absent from our common worship is proposed, we tend to answer, "Why not?" There being no verse of scripture opposed to a practice, however, does not constitute an argument in its favor.

It may afford perspective to recognize that other communions are also reevaluating their worship practices, even as we reconsider ours.³ It seems, that argument counts for less in the dawning "post-denominational" era than it did when denominational affiliation was the primary predictor of religious conviction. In the twenty-first century (and perhaps in every century), social trends shape the decisions congregations make about how as a church we will worship God as much as, and perhaps more than, any scriptural or theological argument. Darryl Tippens thus observes that many of the arguments that have been used to support our musical practice "seem to carry far less

² The most intriguing suggestion of this type I recall having heard is that the instrument was introduced into the worship of the church in AD 666; the preacher didn't draw out the lesson, but it seemed clear who was responsible for the introduction (cf. Rev 13:18).

³ Thomas Day offers an instructive treatment of music in the Catholic Church in America in *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

weight than they once did,” and he invites us to consider “other ways to approach the subject.”⁴

As Christians of the Restoration tradition, a starting point for considering our life together that we can perhaps still agree on is a willingness to let the New Testament be our primary teacher regarding discipleship and the corporate life of the church. That, I suggest, is the key intuition at the heart of the Restorationist way of being Christian. This does not require us to hold that first century churches were perfect; a glance at 1 Corinthians or Galatians will show that they were far from it. It is to suggest rather that the aims of the apostles and apostolic teachers codified in the New Testament ought to be our aims for our churches, as well. When Restorationists set about to “do church,” we begin by considering what kind of community the apostles were trying to foster, and how the forms of Christian life and worship they established were intended to further those aims. So what does the New Testament teach us about the purposes music should serve in the life of the church?⁵

⁴ Darryl Tippens, *That’s Why We Sing: Reclaiming the Wonder of Congregational Singing* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2007), 19. The most substantive argument I know for a *cappella* congregational singing is the work of Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (rev. ed.; Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1972). Ferguson gives due consideration to the lexical argument (1–27), which has often enjoyed pride of place among Restorationists, but I find more significant his demonstration that the considered judgment of the ancient church favored a *cappella* singing in public worship (47–84) and his theological argument that “a *cappella* music is more consistent with the nature of Christian worship” than singing accompanied by instruments (87–96, here 87). The present essay is essentially an expansion on the latter contention.

⁵ While space precludes a full exegetical discussion of each of the relevant texts, good points of entry into interpretation are offered *ad loc.* by (in order of the texts’ appearance here) Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997); James Thompson, *Hebrews* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993); and David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (Word Biblical Commentary 52A; Waco: Word Books, 1997).

From Col 3:16,17 we learn that singing is an element of the church's teaching ministry, an instrument by which the word of God takes up residence in the church's collective consciousness with depth and richness: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God."⁶ The specific functions ascribed to the church's singing are teaching and admonishing one another (in the horizontal dimension) and praising God and giving him thanks (in the vertical dimension). The teaching power of the church's singing remains true to our experience, as we learn more of our theology from what is sung in church than from what is said: do we more often find ourselves in the shower on Monday morning repeating sentences from the sermon, or singing one of the songs that we offered to God in the company of the church the day before?⁷

The ethical importance of the church's song is underscored in the similar passage in Eph 5:15–20. Here we find an emphasis on moral conduct, an indication that the songs of the church teach us not only what to believe but also how to live as people who understand the will of the Lord (v. 17). The passage also gives attention to the setting in which the church sings when Paul instructs us, "Do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (v. 18). Paul contrasts drunkenness with inspiration because the church's singing takes place around the table of the Lord.

The first-century church celebrated the Lord's supper as an actual meal, not merely a symbolic one. But the worship gathering didn't end when the meal ended; it continued in a second phase, which ancients called a "symposium," which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12–14.⁸ Wine was

⁶ Translations of scripture are modified from the RSV.

⁷ The observation is by no means limited to Churches of Christ; I've heard it made most forcefully by a professor in a Presbyterian seminary.

⁸ Dennis Smith's book *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) is informative about the symposium as the cultural framework in which earliest Christian worship developed; my brief reader's guide to the book is that it is right in most of what it says about pagan and Jewish banquets (1–172), and also about

greatly watered down compared with modern table wines, but it was still possible to get drunk, as we recall from 1 Cor 11:21, hence the concern expressed in Ephesians. Paul expresses concern that our singing be a clear witness to the Lord who has redeemed us and that it clearly manifest the presence of the Spirit bestowed on us by Christ (Eph 5:18). A concern for decorum and conduct that reflects favorably on the church is not foreign to the apostolic vision of singing among the people of God.

In 1 Cor 14, Paul devotes attention to the church’s worship in the sung and spoken word and gives a rich perspective on what this worship is to accomplish. The most important terms in the chapter are “edify” and “edification,” describing the effect the words that the church sings and speaks are to have on the Christians who participate (vv. 3–5, 12, 17, 26). The language is drawn from the field of construction; it describes the process of building up, strengthening, and fortifying a structure. In its application to the life of the church by Paul, it does not refer primarily to the production of certain feelings in worshipers (as we sometimes use the English word “edify” to mean) but rather to our being “built up” in faith, hope, and love. “Fortification” might be a better English equivalent for the function of singing Paul has in mind.

This does not mean our singing is divorced from our emotions. Paul is very clear that when we sing both our understanding and our “spirit” are engaged (1 Cor 14:15; cf. Jas 5:13). Paul does not see understanding and feeling as opposed to one another. Rather, our feelings are engaged when we understand the Gospel and the extent of what God has done for us in Christ. We might compare Paul’s doxology after he has concluded his exposition of the Gospel in Rom 11:33–36. The doxology does not confess Paul’s defeat at being able to understand salvation but rather expresses the wonder involved in recognizing the magnitude of what God has done in Christ, “consigning all to sin so that he might have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32).

Paul (173–217), but wrong in much of what it says about Jesus and the Gospels (188–191, 219–277).

In 1 Cor 14:13–17 we see a concern for clarity in the meaning of the church’s song, expressed in Paul’s concern for how an unbeliever will respond to it. We also note in these verses (esp. v. 15) that there is little difference between the church’s singing and the church’s prayer. Luke’s account of Paul and Silas “praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25 RSV) suggests the same.⁹ The music of the church is the church engaged in corporate prayer. The concern for clarity reappears in vv. 23–25, in which Paul expresses the concern that the words spoken and sung in the church’s worship clearly state the need that the Gospel meets. These words are to manifest the presence in our worship of the Creator and Redeemer God of Israel, for the words in which Paul envisions an unbeliever responding to the church’s worship are drawn from Isa 45:14: “Truly God is among you.”

In its brief reference to the church’s music, the letter to the Hebrews similarly presents Christian singing as “a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 13:15). Running through the New Testament references to the church’s singing, then, we find a priority given to verbal expression as a means of articulating the church’s faith and challenging the church to live in conformity with its confession. Further, New Testament passages often regarded by scholars as quotations from early Christian hymns (e.g., Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–18; John 1:1–18) are among the most substantive and challenging statements in the New Testament concerning Christ and his significance.¹⁰ It is instructive to compare our repertoire of songs and see how they measure up.

In the climactic passage of Paul’s letter to the Romans, the church’s song is presented as uniting the church in praise of God (Rom 15:5,6). In this way

⁹ The association between praying and singing is even closer in Greek than in English, in which “praying” represents a participle modifying the main verb for singing; the sense is captured by the Darby translation, “at midnight Paul and Silas, in praying, were praising God with singing” (blueletterbible.com, accessed 10 March 2011).

¹⁰ See for example Oscar Cullman, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (London: Lutterworth, [1949]); Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

the music of the church anticipates the eschatological worship around the throne of God previewed in Rev 4–5, which resounds throughout all creation (Rev 5:8–14). In light of Paul’s prayer and John’s vision, it is a great irony that music has provided the occasion for conflict in the history of our Restoration movement, as it threatens presently in Churches of Christ.¹¹

If we take our cues from the New Testament, the primary questions we will ask about the church’s music are how well it grounds us in the Christian faith and how adequately it equips us to live the Christian life. *A cappella* congregational singing, besides maintaining the contemporary church in continuity with the practice of the early church, focuses us on the words of the songs we offer to God and so accords with the teaching role that the New Testament ascribes to music in the life of the church.

For that role to be fulfilled, we must of course sing songs that have the capacity to teach us what God has done for us in Christ and how we should live in response. From the perspective of the New Testament on the church’s music, it represents a loss to our churches if, for example, “This Is How We Overcome” serves our churches not as a complement to “A Mighty Fortress” but as a replacement for it.¹² Even doctrinally substantive songs of recent vintage (e.g., “In Christ Alone”) tend to emphasize the individual’s experience of faith and to neglect the corporate context of discipleship. This is not to suggest that there was a golden age of music in Churches of Christ from which we’ve now fallen away, so we must return to Mitch Miller’s heyday to regain it. “Mansions Over the Hilltop,” as meaningful as it may have been to people who lived through the Great Depression, is no great primer in the

¹¹ Wendell Willis is instructive as to how disagreements over music in Churches of Christ in recent decades parallel arguments that led to separation from Disciples of Christ a century and more ago (“The Sociological Factors in the Music-in-Worship Controversy,” *Restoration Quarterly* 38 [1996]: 194–203), the fundamental issue being “the character and purposes of worship, especially music in worship” (202).

¹² Tastes of course vary, and there is room within the body of Christ for charitable differences of opinion over the merits of different songs. Strictly on the question of theological substance, however, there is no reasonable dispute about the merits of the two songs mentioned.

Christian faith. It may be that as a communion we have not done as well as we suppose at giving voice to the riches of the Christian faith in song; that is no reason not to try to do better in the future.

One practical benefit of *a cappella* singing is that it tends to strengthen a congregation's ability to praise God and edify one another in song, in the process impressing the words on our consciousness. For those reared in an *a cappella* milieu, it is a striking experience to attend a service in a communion that uses an organ or other accompaniment and notice that scarcely anyone in the assembly is singing. The increased use of amplification in our churches can lead to a technically *a cappella* version of the same phenomenon; it only takes a few trained and amplified voices to fill a worship center with beautiful sound. With discretion and in moderation, this practice may well serve as an adornment to a congregation's worship. If it becomes the mainstay, however, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the congregation's leaders have (despite their best intentions) permitted the song service to be transformed into a concert.

Church leaders who see the value of a vibrant tradition of congregational singing and wish to strengthen this rather than weaken it would do well to give attention to the practical effects of the way the church's worship in song is conducted. Amid the constant press of short-term decisions that must be made to keep a congregation operating from Sunday to Sunday, ministers and elders concerned to strengthen congregational singing must especially work to bear in mind the long-term effects a given practice may have if adopted as a congregational norm. This consideration extends even to the way worship spaces are furnished and appointed. Many churches could enhance their singing, and incidentally reduce the need to rely on amplification, through such mundane reforms as removing carpeting from the worship center or replacing sound-absorbing acoustic tile with a more resonant surface.¹³

¹³ John L. Bell cites the button distributed by GIA Publications with the slogan "Carpet Bedrooms, Not Churches" (*The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* [Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000], 125.) See also *Acoustics for Liturgy: A*

Those of us involved in the church’s teaching ministry should consider how we can best encourage and strengthen the congregational singing of hymns that can deepen the faith of the churches we serve, and here there are some encouraging signs. Pepperdine University has recently inaugurated “The Ascending Voice,” a triennial conference celebrating *a cappella* sacred music throughout Christendom.¹⁴ My colleague Mark Shipp is overseeing a project to make the Book of Psalms accessible for congregational singing, published under the auspices of Abilene Christian University.¹⁵ Universities and seminaries could make a further contribution through the formation of Institutes of Congregational Singing, bringing together persons with musical and theological expertise to provide the resources needed to sustain a contemporary *a cappella* tradition of substance and beauty. The spread of information technology means that the work of such institutes could be made available to churches in the remotest hamlets with a much smaller capital investment than the production of a hymnbook requires.¹⁶ What should be clear is that *a cappella* congregational singing in Churches of Christ will not survive as a practice worthy of preservation by accident. Intentionality and deliberateness will be needed to sustain the kind of—music ministry—the New Testament describes in the culture in which we seek by God’s grace to embody the faith he has entrusted to us.

Collection of Articles of the Hymn Society in the U.S. and Canada (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991).

¹⁴ See Mark Storer, “Pepperdine to hold second triennial Ascending Voice Symposium,” 6 March 2010 (<http://www.vcstar.com/news/2010/may/06/pepperdine-to-hold-second-triennial-ascending>, accessed 10 March 2011).

¹⁵ *Timeless: Ancient Psalms for the Church Today* (Abilene: ACU Press, forthcoming).

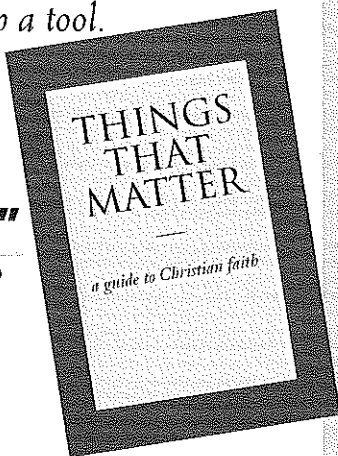
¹⁶ One existing resource useful for acquainting oneself with texts and tunes not featured on Christian radio is the “Net Hymnal” (<http://www.cyberhymnal.org>). GIA Publications also offers a selection of resources valuable for enhancing congregational singing (http://www.giamusic.com/sacred_music/).

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Return, Restoration, and Renewal in Chronicles— and Today*

R. Mark Shipp

The books of Chronicles have a lengthy history of neglect, at least until relatively modern times.¹ This may have been partially attributable to the perception that Chronicles only provided supplementary data to Samuel and Kings and was thus of limited historical or theological value. In recent decades, the focus of scholarship has shifted to literary and historical concerns, i.e., the extent and nature of the Chronicler's history and the date of the composition.² These questions continue to be debated, and interest in the literary, theological, and historiographical value of Chronicles continues to rise.

* I am pleased to submit this article in honor of my colleague, Allan McNicol, whom I have worked with for the past nineteen years. Allan has a longstanding interest in the subject of restorationism and has published several articles on the subject.

¹ The perception of Chronicles as providing only supplementary data to the "real" history of Samuel and Kings goes back at least to the Septuagint translation, which calls the book *paraleipomenon*, "Things Omitted." Recent years have seen a large number of commentaries and monographs written on Chronicles. Of special note are Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) and Gary Knoppers two volume commentary on Chronicles, *I Chronicles 1–9* (New York: Doubleday, 2003) and *I Chronicles 10–29* (New York: Doubleday, 2004). Also, Patrick Graham's three volumes of articles on select topics important to the Chronicler must be cited: M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth Høglund, and Steven McKenzie, eds., *The Chronicler as Historian* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), M. Patrick Graham and Steven McKenzie, eds., *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), and M. Patrick Graham, Steven McKenzie, and Gary Knoppers, eds., *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

² For a discussion of this, see Shipp, "1–2 Chronicles," in *The Transforming Word: A One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 353–356.

It is the thesis of this essay that one of the Chronicler's main concerns is with the restoration of all Israel—politically, socially, and religiously—in the post-exilic age. The way the Chronicler promotes his concerns is by the re-telling of the biblical story from the death of Saul to the exile of Judah. The story of the kings of Judah is presented much like a medieval painting of the Passion Narrative: the characters are biblical, but their dress and ambience are medieval and out of sync with the era in which they lived. This “contemporizing historiography” served the valuable function of telling the ancient stories through the lens of later concerns. In light of its concern for return, renewal and restoration, Chronicles should resonate strongly with those of us in the American Restoration tradition.

Return, Renewal, and Restoration

“Restore” or “restoration” are unusual words in Chronicles, although the concepts are prevalent. The verb *haddesh* (“renew,” “restore”) occurs three times in the book, all within the context of a reform movement: first, in 2 Chron 15:8, relative to Asa's repair of the altar of the Lord, and second, two occurrences which describe Josiah's restoration project on the temple (2 Chron 24:4 and 12). Another verb, *shuv*, literally means “to return,” but often in Chronicles has the connotation of “repent” or “restore.” First, in 2 Chron 6:24–26, 37–38, and 7:14, the temple dedication prayer, Solomon prays that God might hear and forgive when the people of Israel *repent* of sin. In 2 Chron 11:4, Rehoboam attempted to *restore* the kingdom of Israel to Judah, to no avail. Note especially 2 Chron 15:4: “But when in their distress they *turned* to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.” Also note 2 Chron 24:19, where *shuv* is used in a causative sense: “Yet he sent prophets among them to *bring them back* to the LORD; these testified against them, but they would not give heed” (See also 2 Chron 30:6, 9; 32:25; and 36:13).

One of the most common words for “restore” in Chronicles is *hazzeq*, meaning “to strengthen,” “make strong (again),” “repair.” It is always used of building/restoration projects, fortifications, or political entities (1 Chron

26:27, 29:12, 2 Chron 11:11, 12, 17, 24:5, 12, 26:9, 29:3, 34, 32:5, 34:8, 10, 35:2).

Other words, translated “restore” or “repair,” are less common in Chronicles, but help us get a picture of the Chronicler’s concerns. One such word is *kûn*, “to establish,” in the context of re-establishing or restoring worship (2 Chron 29:35 and 33:16).

While this is not an exhaustive survey, it is adequate to demonstrate the Chronicler’s concern for “return, renewal, and restoration.” The focus of this concern is “all Israel” as a community of worship, as a community under *Torah*, and as a unified community.

Israel as a Community of Worship

Some scholars of the past have subsumed all of the Chronicler’s theological concerns into this one area: concern for temple and worship.³ While this is an overstatement, there is no question that concerns for worship, temple, and the organization of the priests and Levites loom very large in Chronicles. This can be seen in the very beginning of the book in the genealogies (1 Chron 1–9) and also in the very first narrative (1 Chron 10). If amount of dedicated space in genealogies is indicative of importance, then Judah and Levi have pride of place in the genealogies. Other tribes have some genealogical entries, such as the Trans-Jordanian tribes (2 1/2 tribes east of the Jordan), which figure in chapter 5. Naphtali receives one verse (1 Chron 8:13). Judah and Levi, on the other hand, have two or three chapters each, underscoring the Chronicler’s focus upon the twin pillars of his theology: king and temple.⁴

The Chronicler is vitally interested in worship in Israel and in grounding that worship in God’s covenant with David. His agenda in including the ex-

³ See, for example, Edward Curtis and Albert Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 7–17.

⁴ Judah in chapter 2 and half of chapter 4, also the genealogy of David in chapter 3; Levi in chapter 6 and most of 9).

tensive genealogies at the beginning of his work is to connect post-exilic Judah—the Persian province of Yehud—with the nation of Israel and its covenants, especially the Davidic covenant, prior to the exile. To the Chronicler, the community, worship, and organization of Judah in the fifth century BC is continuous with pre-exilic Israel. It is important to him that the organization of Judah’s priesthood and worship in post-exilic Judah—musicians, gatekeepers, and the complex system of Levitical orders—be grounded in and legitimated by Israel’s earliest temple traditions, involving Solomon and even more, David.

1 Chronicles 10, which begins the narrative part of the book, sets up the reason for the rejection and demise of Saul and God’s choice of David. In a synoptic passage with 2 Sam 31, Saul is killed on the field of battle against the Philistines. Of special interest are the last two verses (10:13,14), non-synoptic with 1 Sam 31. The reason given for the rejection of Saul is because he was unfaithful and sought out a medium, but did not “seek the Lord,” which sometimes means in Chronicles to seek the presence of the Lord in the temple and at the ark of the covenant.

After the death of Saul, David is immediately anointed king over “all Israel” at Hebron. The balance of 1 Chron 11–12 is dedicated to a catalogue of David’s supporters: first his inner circle of “mighty men,” then warriors of every one of the tribes, north and south, come to David first at Ziklag, and then at Hebron to support him. The “all Israel” emphasis of the Chronicler cannot be missed—segments of all the tribes unanimously support David’s bid for the kingdom. Once David is anointed, his first order of business is to conquer the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and make it his own. This is a necessary precursor to bringing the ark of the covenant up from its lengthy stay at Kiriath-Jearim, where Saul had “neglected it,” because the ark was to be housed in a “tent” in Jerusalem (see 1 Chron 15:1). Chapters 13 and 15–16 deal with the subject of bringing the ark into Jerusalem and organizing Levitical worship. One can immediately see that the concerns of the Chronicler are not at all the same as those of the compiler of Samuel and Kings: David’s

kingship is established and blessed because he “sought the Lord,” particularly in matters of the cult, whereas Saul was rejected because he did not.⁵

Most of the balance of 1 Chronicles treats the subject of David’s planning the construction of the temple, which his son Solomon was to carry out. Even the one sin the Chronicler allows David—numbering the people—was necessary because this account is the origin story of the sites of the temple site the altar of sacrifice:

Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and rear an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. . . . Then David said, “Here shall be the house of the Lord and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel” (1 Chron 21:18, 22:1).

The first part of 2 Chronicles follows in the same manner. The first act of Solomon as king is to worship at the “high place that was at Gibeon; for the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness, was there” (2 Chron 1:3).⁶ 2 Chronicles 2–7 and portions of chapters 1 and 8 describe the building of the temple, its dedication, and worship at the appropriate shrine. God blessed Solomon because he “sought the Lord” like David (2 Chron 1:5). He mainly did that through worship and sacrifice at the Lord’s altar and the ark of the covenant.

The kings which follow Solomon in Judah are evaluated on the basis of their commitment to the restoration or advancement of the cult, the temple, and the proper consecration and ordination of the priests and Levites. Abijah of Judah condemns Jeroboam of Israel because he did not install proper priests and Levites, descended from Aaron (2 Chron 13:8–12). Asa “sought the Lord,” like David and Solomon, and so removed idols from the land and repaired the altar of sacrifice (2 Chron 15). In one of the more interesting

⁵ See Steven McKenzie, *1–2 Chronicles* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 120.

⁶ In 1 Chron 1 and 2, Solomon’s first act is to worship the Lord in Gibeon. In 1 Kings 1 and 2, Solomon’s first acts are to consolidate his power and to remove or marginalize his opponents. Thus, the Chronicler emphasizes Solomon’s piety and faithfulness to God.

passages in Chronicles, Asa's son Jehoshaphat sought the Lord through fasting and prayer during a war with the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites. Jehoshaphat and all the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem bowed to the ground and worshipped. Then the Levites began to sing the psalmic refrain (*kî tôb kî l'olam hasdô*, "for he is good, for his loyalty is everlasting"). The Lord ambushed the warring parties and they were routed. Two of the great kings in Judah's history—Josiah and Hezekiah—were idealized primarily because they renovated the temple and restored worship. Both re-instituted the Passover, one hundred years apart. About both kings the text says there was never a Passover like it, before or after!

Israel as a Community Under *Torah*

Undergirding the Chronicler's theology of restoration of the cult is his "back to the Bible" movement, or concern for recovery of *Torah*, as exemplified in the good kings of Judah's past who "sought the Lord." To the Chronicler, David and Solomon are paradigmatic kings who sought the Lord in worship and in the *Torah*:

And [David] left Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD upon the altar of burnt offering continually morning and evening, according to all that is written in the law (*Torah*) of the LORD which he commanded Israel (1 Chron 16:39,40).

In David's initial setting up of worship in Jerusalem (which to the Chronicler began with David and the tent he set up for worship, rather than with Solomon),⁷ everything is done scrupulously according to the *Torah* of Moses. Similarly, Solomon also sought the Lord according to the *Torah*:

Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father what thou hast promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a man before me to sit upon the throne of

⁷ Simon de Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (The Forms of Old Testament Literature, vol. 11; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 149–150. See also McKenzie, 142–146.

Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk in my law (*Torah*) as you have walked before me” (2 Chron 6:16).

The “reforming” kings of Judah follow this same pattern, promoting the reading and keeping of the *Torah*. Asa, for example, “[C]ommanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law (*Torah*) and the commandment” (2 Chron 14:4).

Jehoshaphat, likewise, assigned “princes and Levites” to teach the book of the *Torah* of the Lord in the cities of Judah. Jehoiada the priest, young king Joash’s mentor, also was scrupulous to follow the *Torah* relative to temple organization (2 Chron 23:18). Amaziah, who was faithful (but not perfectly so), did not put the children of the murderers of his father to death, in keeping with the *Torah* of Moses.

It is not surprising that the two kings who most resemble David and Solomon in terms of faithful seeking of the Lord, Hezekiah and Josiah, also read and kept the precepts of the *Torah*.

Israel As a Unified Community

One of the Chronicler’s main concerns is “all Israel,” north and south, as a unified community. To the Chronicler, Israel was an ideal entity, a twelve tribe whole, in contrast with the fractured remnants which are his reality in the post-exilic age. This concern for the restoration of all Israel, and to demonstrate the continuity of the post-exilic community with pre-exilic Israel, is demonstrated already in the genealogies of 1 Chron 1–9. All tribes are given genealogical entries, even though in some cases they are vestigial (e.g., the genealogy of Naphtali). The returnees to Judah from Babylon in chapter 9 also include some from the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh:

So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies; and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants. And some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh dwelt in Jerusalem.

Note the repetition of “all Israel,” and interestingly, “Israel” mentioned again in 1 Chron 9:1–3. The returnees living in Jerusalem include half northern tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) and half southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin). To the Chronicler, Israel is a twelve tribe sacred community under *Torah*, and the restoration of this community must include everything which pertained to pre-exilic Israel.⁸

The phrase *kol yisra'el* (“all Israel”) occurs 43 times in the book of Chronicles. Following the genealogies, the balance of the book is replete with this phrase. After the death of Saul (1 Chron 10:6, 13), David’s first act is to go with “all Israel,” to conquer the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. After Jerusalem was secured, David’s mighty men gave him strong support in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel (1 Chron 11:4).

After two chapters of detailing David’s supporters who came to him at Hebron and Ziklag, we hear that “all Israel” came to make David king:

All these, men of war, arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel; likewise all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king (1 Chron 12:38).⁹

Once again, it is important to the Chronicler to establish that all Israel is supportive of David and is of one mind regarding his kingship.

At important junctures in the lives of David and Solomon, related to the ark of the covenant and the building of the temple, all Israel is unified in support of the temple and its priesthood, the cult, and the ark (see 1 Chron 13:5–8, 15:3 and 28, 28:4 and 8, 29:21, 23, 25, and many other passages). “All Israel” is critical to the Chronicler, for he is compiling his history in the post-exilic era in order to inspire the remnants of the Judeans and North Israelites to seek the Lord together, with unity of purpose and identity.

⁸ For the “all Israel” emphasis, see de Vries, 146–148. Relative to the Chronicler’s concerns that all Israel, North and South, ought to be a single entity in both pre- and post-exilic Judah, see Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 14; Waco: Word Books, 1986), xxxv–xxxvii.

⁹ Braun, *1 Chronicles*, 171.

Return, Restoration, and Renewal in Chronicles and Today

The Chronicler is concerned first of all with return (*shûv*) or repentance. Seeking the Lord in Chronicles most often entails putting away the false gods of the age and returning to the Lord with the whole heart. Part of this return to the Lord involves renewal of worship and the institutions which surround it, which through carelessness or idolatry fall into disrepair and disrepute. In the book of Chronicles, those who seek the Lord with their whole heart will renew and recommit to worship and prayer, will work to rediscover and re-dedicate themselves to the way of *Torah* (God's righteous instruction), and will do so in unity of heart and purpose. Then God will honor his commitment for his people to be a light to the nations and for the seed of Abraham to fulfill its purpose envisioned so long ago (1 Chron 16:13).

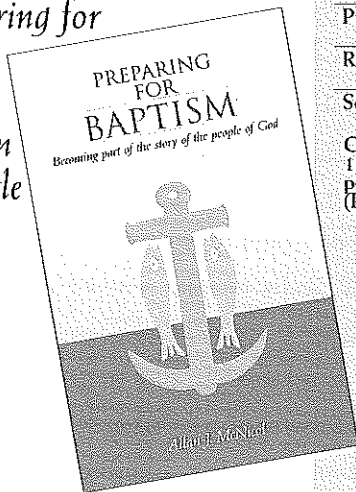
In light of this paradigm for restoration, it is ironic that we who have emphasized the restoration of biblical doctrine and practices, the unity of the Spirit, and the life of faith, have missed the most obvious model for restoration in the Bible. If the Chronicler's vision of restoration includes Israel as a faithful, worshipping community, a community which seeks to recover scripture, and the unity of God's people, nothing could be more pertinent to the ideals of Restorationism.

It is easy for the church in our day to assign the texts and themes of the Chronicler to the *marginalia* of life, where it is consigned to the museum of ancient historical oddities. But we, like the Chronicler's community of old, have a tendency to forget the covenants and the promises of God. We, too, tend towards entropy in personal and corporate worship, to lose the Word even in the midst of being overwhelmed and inundated by words. We, too, are often the sadly fractured and disjointed community of faith in the world. Perhaps a fresh look at our own restoration roots and ideals might provoke us again to recover the surprising words of grace and judgment by the prophets and apostles. Perhaps recovery of our own *Torah* will lead us to reexamine, in the crisis of identity the church now faces, the Chronicler's paradigm of return, renewal, and restoration.

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American Fundamentalists: The Left Behind

Michael R. Weed

In every church, in every institution, there is something which sooner or later works against the very purpose for which it came into existence.

C.S. Lewis¹

All religions are founded upon visions of what is believed to be transcendent reality: a “metaphysical vision” of what is ultimately true and good.² From such visions attempts are made to illuminate the nature and purpose of human existence. Further, all religions develop doctrines, rites, and symbols re-creating the transcendent vision and conveying its relevance to everyday life. The longer a religion exists, the more challenges it endures, and the more doctrines, rites, and disciplines it accumulates. Historically, when an awareness arises that a religion’s transcendent vision is endangered, movements appear to recover that vision, correcting and reemphasizing neglected truths and practices.

Understandably, it is not uncommon for such reform or recovery movements to be imprinted by factors associated with their immediate historical contexts, e.g., the perceived failure of leaders, threatening social changes, and outside influences that need to be resisted.³ Consequently, it is not infre-

¹ *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1984), 94. It is not uncommon that what reform and recovery movements recover—or restore—becomes predominantly shaped by what they perceive themselves to be reacting against.

² Cf. Max L. Stackhouse, “Fundamentalism Around the World,” *The Christian Century*, August 28–September 4, (1985), 770.

³ *Ibid.*

quent that beliefs and practices recovered in challenging circumstances may display emphases differing from a religion's previous history that significantly alter their earlier meanings.⁴

American Protestant Fundamentalism

In American Protestantism, the designation "fundamentalism" is derived from a widely circulated series of twelve volumes published between 1910 and 1915 titled *The Fundamentals*.⁵ These volumes, financed by California millionaires Milton and Lyman Stewart and written by conservative scholars from America and Great Britain, were distributed at no cost throughout the English-speaking world.⁶ In all, some three million volumes were distributed, reaffirming fundamental doctrines of Protestant Christianity with the intent of protecting churches against threats posed by theological liberalism perceived to be making inroads into American Protestant churches.

The circulation given *The Fundamentals* notwithstanding, American Protestant fundamentalism had its origins in a constellation of historical, social, intellectual, and religious factors developing in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although not capturing the attention that the circulation of *The Fundamentals* received, similar statements had been composed in the latter half of the previous century. The Niagara Bible Conference, for example, initiated in

⁴For example, Martin Luther's emphasis on justification *sola fidei* to the neglect of a doctrine of sanctification is generally recognized as a reaction to the Medieval Church's preoccupation with "works righteousness" as "sanctification."

⁵Baptist editor of the *Watchman-Examiner* Curtis Lee Laws (1868–1946), who is commonly credited with applying the appellation "fundamentalist" to describe conservative Baptists, did not attach belief in "biblical inerrancy" to the designation. Rather, Laws contended that "The infallibility of the Bible is the infallibility of common sense, and of the experiential triumph within us. . . . It is our authority because it does for us what our souls need." George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 118f.

⁶Ibid. Pastors, missionaries, theology professors, theological students, YMCA and YWCA secretaries, college professors, Sunday school superintendents, and religious editors were recipients.

1876, issued a statement in 1895 asserting five “essential” doctrines perceived to be threatened by theological liberalism: (1) verbal inerrancy of scripture, (2) the deity and virgin birth of Christ, (3) substitutionary atonement, (4) Christ’s physical resurrection, and (5) Christ’s bodily return to earth.⁷ In 1910, the Presbyterian General Assembly adopted a declaration of essential doctrines: (1) the inerrancy of scripture, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) substitutionary atonement, (4) Christ’s bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of biblical miracles.⁸

Clearly behind such statements were perceptions that orthodox Protestant beliefs were being threatened and the vision of a Protestant America was endangered. In the North, urbanization, education, immigration (e.g., the arrival of Roman Catholic immigrants), and social mobility were combining to weaken influences of traditional Protestant culture while spreading new religious ideas.

In the deep background of Protestant fundamentalism, however, looms the Civil War as a major watershed in American cultural history, affecting virtually all areas of American life, especially life in the South. While in the postwar North, the old order of American Protestantism was “about to crumble,”⁹ in the postwar South, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians remained separated from their northern counterparts. Further, in the Reconstruction period (1865–70), southerners found themselves overrun by northern occupation forces, carpetbaggers, adventurers, and opportunists. Consequently, southern culture maintained nostalgic views of the antebellum past, visions which reinforced southern resistance to change, innovation, and perceived “outside influences.” In the postwar South, religion would become a crucial

⁷ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1965), 283.

⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 117.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

means of preserving traditional beliefs and customs associated with an idealized vision of antebellum southern Christian culture.¹⁰

Winds of Change in the North

The dominant outlook in the post-Civil War North was considerably different from that of the South. Riding on the heels of the North's victory and preservation of the Union, "unbridled cheerfulness, confidence, and complacency" underwrote a cultural mood of optimism, trust in human progress, and openness to the future.¹¹ Social mobility, industrialization, and the influx of European immigrants (many Roman Catholic) occasioned significant social and cultural changes. Equally important would be the influence of European intellectual culture entering the American academic scene through professors and students returning from study on the Continent. Darwinism and German higher criticism of scripture proved to be among the most significant influences in the area of religion.

Inevitably these influences reshaped perceptions of the nature and veracity of scripture and the function of the Christian religion. In time they would eventuate in the evolution of American Protestant liberalism. As early as 1868, the president of Princeton (then the College of New Jersey), James McCosh, who had come to the United States from Scotland, maintained that modern science and Christianity were not in conflict. McCosh argued that scripture tells that God created the universe while modern science discerns the manner in which He did so.¹²

During this same period northern seminaries and churches also began to be exposed to developments in European (essentially German) biblical scholarship in the form of higher criticism, which, as opposed to "lower," or "tex-

¹⁰ Southern Methodists had separated from their northern counterpart in 1845, Baptists in 1845, and Presbyterians in 1857. Cf. Hudson, 217.

¹¹ Ibid., Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 137.

¹² Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 17f.

tual criticism,”¹³ investigates the historical setting and authorship of ancient documents. German scholars F. C. Baur (d.1860) and D. F. Strauss (d.1874), pioneers in higher criticism, were influenced by G. W. F. Hegel (d. 1831) and utilized his dialectical/evolutionary views in reconstructing the historical development of the New Testament and the early church.¹⁴ Although such views evoked opposition, many traditional confessions were nonetheless modified.

A new attitude was appearing, represented in Henry Ward Beecher’s exhortation to theological students at Yale in 1872 that “disposition, conduct, and greatheartedness is more akin to the Gospel spirit than dogma or doctrine.”¹⁵ For the most part, however, advocates of the “new Christianity” did not overtly attack historical Christian doctrines. Rather, they preached a message that resonated with the optimistic and future-oriented culture. Phillips Brooks (d.1893), author of “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” offered a statement representing the confidence of the era:

[T]here is nothing in religion, there is nothing in Christianity, which has not its roots in human nature and in the fundamental affections of mankind. . . . [B]elieve in yourselves and reverence your own human nature; it is the only salvation from brutal vice and every false belief. An optimist is a believer in the best, and any man who believes that anything less than the best is the ultimate purpose of God . . . has no business to live upon the earth.¹⁶

Within this broad context, European intellectual culture was finding its way into American universities and theological schools, especially the influences of Darwinism and higher criticism.¹⁷ Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Spe-*

¹³ Lower criticism, or textual criticism, is the discipline of examining ancient manuscripts with the intent of recovering the earliest—if not original—text. Cf. Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 61 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. E. C. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 137 ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 18 ff.

cies (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) proposed arguments for the evolution of life through “natural selection” as opposed to the biblical accounts of the divine origin of the universe, including human life.¹⁸

Challenges to Fundamentalism

While some read Darwin as providing scientific grounds for atheism, others attempted to correlate Darwin’s *how* with biblical understandings of *why* the universe—and human beings—exist. Still others sought to defend the Genesis account of creation as literal historical narrative. For the latter, scripture’s trustworthiness was directly threatened by Darwinism and higher criticism.

In the spring of 1925, the evolution issue received nationwide attention through the famed Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, punctuated by William Jennings Bryan’s death five days after the trial.¹⁹ With the coverage of the *Baltimore Sun*’s reporter, agnostic H. L. Mencken, the Scopes trial would become viewed as the turning point in marginalizing fundamentalism in America by linking it with uneducated rural southern culture.²⁰ Mencken widely publicized such associations, taking the Scopes trial and Bryan’s death as opportunities to mock both Bryan and Southern rural America as backward and superstitious—and to associate fundamentalism with both.²¹

¹⁸ Cf. T. A. Burkhill, *The Evolution of Christian Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 366.

¹⁹ See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 184 ff. Biology teacher John Scopes was brought to trial for teaching evolution in the local high school in violation of state law banning such teaching. Aging William Jennings Bryan represented the state while the American Civil Liberties Union provided Scopes’ defense with Clarence Darrow, atheist son of a Unitarian minister. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187. Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee’s 1955 Broadway play and later film *Inherit the Wind* did much to reinforce stereotypes regarding southern culture as backward, sectarian, superstitious, etc.

²¹ Also see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 13–32, 57–75. Larson argues that the Scopes trial was not the turning point for fundamentalism as is commonly portrayed. Although rewriting the history of the Scopes trial would carry significant weight, this did not occur for decades after the trial.

Countering contentions of fundamentalism's origins as a southern and rural phenomenon, however, is Gresham Machen (1881–1937), a major figure in the development of American fundamentalism. After graduating from Johns Hopkins, Machen studied in Tübingen, Germany. There he was unsettled by Wilhelm Hermann's persuasive articulation of Protestant liberalism as the religion *of* Jesus, not the religion *about* Jesus. Hermann focused on the Sermon on the Mount in contrast to complicated Christological formulae developed over centuries by the church. Corresponding with his family in America, Machen described Hermann as "overpowering in the sincerity of religious devotion,"²² "brilliant," and "devout."²³ Four days later Machen further described Hermann's effect upon his own views:

He speaks right to the heart; and I have been thrown all into confusion by what he says—so much deeper is his devotion to Christ than anything I have known in myself during the past few years.²⁴

Two weeks later Machen, appearing to have collected himself, wrote:

Hermann has shown me something of the religious power which lies back of this great movement, which is now making a fight even for the control of the Northern Presbyterian Church in America. In New England those who do not believe in the bodily Resurrection of Jesus are, generally speaking, religiously dead; in Germany, Hermann has taught me that that is by no means the case.²⁵

Machen returned to America concerned about the threat posed by European liberalism's duplicitous attractions to "the religion of Jesus." He would teach at Princeton from 1906 until 1929, leaving to form Westminster Theological Seminary in response to liberalism's inroads at Princeton Seminary. While Machen expressed respect for those whose studies led them to reject

²² J. Gresham Machen, *A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 106.

²³ *Ibid.*, 106–108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

traditional Christian beliefs (e.g., miracles and the bodily resurrection of Jesus), he had no respect for those who modified such beliefs and subscribed to them in a symbolic and arguably deceitful fashion.²⁶ Such concerns led Machen and others, in 1936, to found the Presbyterian Church of America, which shortly afterward became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Machen's reaction to "Modernism"—principally European higher criticism—in founding a conservative "fundamentalist" Presbyterian church was not an isolated event; it mirrored similar developments occurring in Protestant churches throughout America. As a call "back to the Bible," fundamentalism resonated with most Protestant Americans as a practical or common sense approach to honoring God and preserving biblical faith from threats—real and perceived—whether from European intellectuals or from Roman Catholicism.

Certainly Restoration churches, which had become one of the fastest-growing Protestant groups in America, were able to capitalize on such sympathies. In time, however, Restoration churches would experience disagreements and irreconcilable differences over both theology and church polity.²⁷ These differences would eventuate in divisions reflecting issues associated with the broader spectrum of American Protestantism as well as issues unique to restorationism.

In time, the Disciples of Christ would emerge aligned with Protestant liberalism, while the more conservative Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ would align with "anti-modernists," variously viewing themselves as "conservative," or "fundamentalist." Among Churches of Christ, publications such as the *Gospel Advocate* (founded in Nashville, 1885, by David Lipscomb) and the *Firm Foundation* (founded in Houston,

²⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991, orig. 1925), 34.

²⁷ See Kevin R. Kragenbrink, "The Modernist/Fundamentalist Controversy and the Emergence of the Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," *Restoration Quarterly*, 42:1 (2000), 3f.

1884, by Austin McGary²⁸) and, over time, Christian Colleges (e.g., Lipscomb, Abilene Christian, and Harding) attempted to provide stability beyond the boundaries of theoretically autonomous “local congregations.”²⁹ Over the past half century, both the influences of the Christian colleges and reaction to the incessant contentiousness of quasi-fundamentalist publications have led to the majority of Churches of Christ mirroring a *de facto* version of the mid-century recovery of the Reformation designation “evangelicalism.”

Emergence of Neo-Evangelicals

Within a decade of Machen’s death in 1937, American fundamentalism experienced challenges which would expose its weaknesses and directly contribute to the eventual dismissal of fundamentalism as a significant voice in American culture. Ironically, fundamentalism’s strongest challenge did not come from Protestant liberalism. Rather, fundamentalism’s marginalization would come from the ranks of disenchanted fundamentalists who had come to recognize that in defending biblical Christianity against the threats of Protestant liberalism, they themselves had adopted serious, even endangering, misemphases.

In this regard, four developments are commonly cited as bringing about the waning of American fundamentalism. First, in 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded by Harold John Okenga and others. Second, within five years, in 1947, Carl F. H. Henry’s *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* observed that fundamentalism’s preoccupations with arguing about scripture’s authenticity and veracity (namely, against higher criticism), however well intended, had led to a loss of touch with the religion of scripture and had seriously diminished the relevance of

²⁸ It is not insignificant, and it is perhaps prophetic, that the *Firm Foundation* was founded to combat the *Gospel Advocate*’s approval of David Lipscomb’s admission of Baptists into Churches of Christ on the basis of Baptist baptism.

²⁹ Eventually, the influences of such publications among Restoration churches would raise questions regarding congregational autonomy and occasion the epithet “Editor Bishop.”

the Gospel to all areas of human life.³⁰ In effect, American Protestant fundamentalism had allowed itself to become more of a religion *about* the New Testament than the religion *of* the New Testament.

Specifically, Henry was concerned that fundamentalists were silent regarding Christ's relevance to the problems of the world which God had created and for which Christ died. Henry viewed this failure as, in large part, a result of fundamentalism's divorce of doctrine from life; of separating orthodoxy ("right belief") from orthopraxy ("right practice"). Henry reminded readers that "the great contemporary problems are both moral and spiritual," and that with regard to the "near and distant neighbor," fundamentalism had in effect become a modern version of the priest and Levite, bypassing suffering humanity.³¹ Consequently, the Gospel was being privatized and the world was being deprived of the only means of substantial and lasting social reform, namely, the living water of the Gospel. Henry exhorted those recognizing these misemphases of fundamentalism—and their fuller implications—to set about to recover the essence of Christian faith, drawing their vision for American Christianity from the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation's recovery of the *euangelion*, the good news of the Gospel: ". . . in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor 5:19 RSV).

Third, in 1947 Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, was founded by radio evangelist Charles E. Fuller and Harold Ockenga as a seminary to provide an evangelical alternative to both modernist and fundamentalist seminaries in America. The seminary was an immediate and lasting success, today enrolling over 4,000 full- and part-time students.

Finally, almost a decade later, in 1955, with evangelist Billy Graham's backing, the periodical *Christianity Today* was launched with Carl F. H. Henry as its first editor. In part, the magazine was envisioned as an

³⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 1 ff.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

“evangelical” response to the liberal Protestant periodical *Christian Century*. The stated intent of *Christianity Today* was to “express the evangelical Christian point of view in an intellectual manner” and to “place the evangelical flag in the middle of the road”—“conservative theologically and liberal socially.”³²

Fundamentalists: The Left Behind

By the 1950s, most Protestant churches (e.g., Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Free Churches) were experiencing wrenching divisions with all the complexity and unpleasantness associated with family feuds. While these invariably involved issues unique to each tradition and were shaped by different church polities, they also reflected the reality of unresolvable differences associated with fundamentalist positions on matters such as the manner of scripture’s inspiration and the meaning of scripture’s “inerrancy.” The result was that most American Protestant churches, in reacting against what they perceived as the narrow and unbiblical extremism of fundamentalism, were adopting positions similar to those of the emerging American evangelical movement. Significantly, fewer churches were using the term “fundamentalist” as a self-designation.³³

Fast-paced changes associated with urbanization, social mobility, secular education, and mass communication all contributed to the evolution of a social environment which made it increasingly difficult for fundamentalist churches to shield their members from encountering not only secular forces but also—perhaps an even greater threat—evangelical versions of Christianity that were more compatible with the clear teachings of scripture and with the engaging message of the gospel.

³² Cf. Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³³ The present writer remembers Dr. J. D. Thomas in the early 1960s, Chair of the Bible Department at Abilene Christian University (then ACC), encouraging students to read *Christianity Today* and telling us—although he knew there were fundamentalists among us—that we “restorationists” were not “fundamentalists”; we were “conservatives.”

Today, half a century later, while fundamentalist churches may be located on the outskirts of large urban areas, they are more commonly found in small towns and rural areas of southern and midwestern states. Further, the demography of such churches suggests that fundamentalists have difficulty attracting young families and are largely unable to pass on their beliefs to teenagers and young adults.

In practice, modern American fundamentalists commonly employ fear and intimidation to sustain a “bunker mentality” among the faithful few.³⁴ Recitations of threats posed by modernity (liberalism, communism, modernism, psychologism, existentialism, secular humanism, and postmodernism, etc.) constitute a litany of warnings against evils lurking to snare those who might explore beyond the boundaries of fundamentalist enclaves. For those resistant to such warnings, who question—much less challenge—fundamentalist presuppositions, stronger measures include threats to an individual’s reputation, embarrassment to his or her family, and perhaps being publicly identified (“written up”) in fundamentalist publications.

Fundamentalism, being a religion *about* the New Testament rather than *of* the New Testament (believers mentioned in New Testament writings did not possess New Testaments), most fundamentalists have a minimal understanding of New Testament teaching on sanctification.³⁵ That is, one “gets right with God” by living in strict adherence to lists of directives—mainly

³⁴ Alister McGrath observes that fundamentalists, developing an “oppositionalist mentality” through their preoccupation with identifying opponents, have virtually “imploded” in controversies as they have turned on one another in “pervasive infighting.” Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 394.

³⁵ Ultimately, fundamentalists acknowledge the Bible’s authority on the basis of rational arguments for its inspiration. Historically, the foundation of Christian faith is not human reason but trust in the one who said, “I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end” (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13) and “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). While fundamentalism accepts such statements, it does so on the basis of its prior authentication of scripture through rational argument. This unbiblical epistemological commitment reverses—and arguably voids—the “scandal” of the gospel. Lacking criteria to “assess God,” would-be believers must “come” in order to “see” (e.g., John 1:39, 46, 4:29).

restrictions and prohibitions—constructed from New Testament writings.³⁶ In fact, this caricature virtually precludes any understanding of sanctification or significant spiritual growth; once “right,” one cannot become “more right.” Consequently, the fundamentalist view of the Christian life tends to be analogous to a holding pattern in which one stays “right with God.” This static view of the Christian life also lies behind one of the most noxious aspects of fundamentalism: not unlike schoolyard bullies whose treatment of others expresses their insecurity, fundamentalists must reassure themselves of being right through relentless criticisms of others.

Early Christians were instructed that, rather than rational arguments *about* the word of God, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17, KJV). Tragically, fundamentalists are not left in the first century, nor even the second century. Rather, fundamentalists are stranded somewhere in the early decades of 20th century America, anxiously defending a religion *about* the New Testament in a world increasingly open to the religion *of* the New Testament.

God in his grace works through our limitations;
for that very reason we should ask for the grace
to recognize what those limitations are.

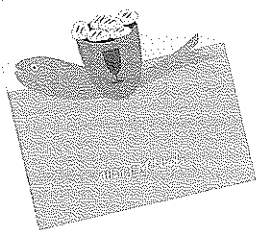
George Marsden

³⁶ “Jesus clearly saw that there are two decisive weaknesses to moral legalism. One is that even if there were a law, man can keep it outwardly as he sins inwardly. The other is the impracticality of making a law corresponding to every situation that might occur.” (Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 419f). Henry further observes that “this negativism in fundamentalist ethics may conceal the fact that one who abstains from the proscribed may be every bit as carnal as one who indulges. Arbitrary legalism is a poor substitute for an inner morality. Not only this, but such legalism emphasizes the less important issues in life, and ignores or excuses the weightier matters of the law. Smoking can be a subject of legislation; pride cannot” (421).

*What does one expect to take place
at the Lord's Table?*



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My Theological Journey: A Retrospective

Allan J. McNicol

All theology is, to some degree, reflective of a personal journey. I am grateful to family, dear friends, and fellow teachers (some of whom are contributors to this issue) who have nourished me over the years. To all of them, collectively, I owe a huge debt. I am not much without them. They taught me what I know.

Above all, my life has centered on being a teacher. My earliest recollection of teaching was directing an “intermediate” Bible class at my home church in Australia when I was fifteen. Since then hardly a week has gone by when I have not been teaching in some way or another. But this short essay is not a memoir. Rather, I wish simply to underscore several concerns that have engaged my attention in teaching and writing in past years. These fall into two general areas.

Theology in the Stone-Campbell (Restorationist) Tradition

For over a hundred years my family has pursued the journey of faith in this tradition. Most of my teaching took place in schools under similar auspices. One knows generally what concerns a Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed theologian is expected to address. But in Churches of Christ this is not all that clear. Do we have an identifiable way of doing theology? Are we a definable theological tradition?

I have spent a fair amount of time attempting to answer most of these issues in the affirmative. To provide coherence for these claims I have attempted to build on the work of earlier Restorationists such as the English

theologian William Robinson and, to some extent, certain Americans who maintain a commitment to the biblical view of the centrality of the oneness of the church as a given for the faith of the earliest Christians. Robinson argued that the core of Christianity is marked by the proclamation of the gospel which announces that the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are bestowed to all who receive them in believer's baptism and faithful observance of the Lord's Supper. I believe that a viable theological tradition can be built on this foundation. My two small books on *Preparing for Baptism* and *Preparing for the Lord's Supper* develop this theme.¹ On the wider issue, I realize that even after two hundred years the jury is still out on whether we have developed a definable theological tradition. It will be up to others in generations to come to make the final judgments. In the meanwhile, I would like to be counted among those who see our emphases on the centrality of gospel and ordinances as the foundation for at least, a definable ecclesiology.

The Problem of Patternism

During my journey several issues have evoked considerable conflict. Two, in which I have been actively involved, may be noted briefly. First there was the discussion concerning the viability of "the blueprint model" of reading scripture.² This has had a long history in both Reformed and Restoration circles. Essentially the New Testament is studied along the same lines as one would read a blueprint for building a house. In the case of the study of the New Testament one presumes that the architectural model for the entire Christian faith is encoded in the text. But a glance at the kind of writings that make up the New Testament show that they are far different from plans for a house. They are occasional writings addressing various concerns of the earli-

¹ Allan J. McNicol, *Preparing for Baptism: Becoming Part of the Story of the People of God* (Austin: Christian Studies Press, 2001) and *Preparing for the Lord's Supper: Nourishing Spiritual Life Through the Lord's Meal* (Austin: Christian Studies Press, 2007).

² The most accessible statement of my position on this issue is my unpublished paper "Theological Method on the Bible Among Churches of Christ: A Proposal" at http://www.austingrad.edu/academics_mcnicol_resource.html.

est Christians who had been taught the faith. I believe that the Bible is normative for the Christian community. But I believe it should be read as the story of the people of God. A narrative reading of scripture involves us in God's on-going story with his creation. This understanding of the Bible as God's story also lies at the heart of my interest in Biblical Theology. In a number of circles this approach has generally been well received.

Encounter with Evangelicals

This is not the case with another issue that has come to my attention. By and large most people recognize today that American Protestantism can be viewed as two basic constituencies: Mainliners (Liberals) and Evangelicals (Conservatives). Churches of Christ, ecclesiologically, at least, represent a third way. They call for the unity of all believers based on the preaching of the gospel and, in keeping with the common faith of the church, its reception in believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. My concern is that leaders of Churches of Christ, some deliberately, others unwittingly, are encouraging our people to view themselves primarily as Evangelicals. I think this is a mistake. This only leads to a loss of identity. Clear biblical teaching is compromised in favor of openness to such things ranging from Calvinism, evangelical models of worship (still a hot topic), to offbeat millennial views. Much of this embrace is grounded in the belief that it will attract greater numbers to our services.

However, the point I have attempted to make in the last decade or so goes even deeper. By and large we in Churches of Christ have viewed ourselves as an "alternative community" to the denominations while standing over against the mainstream culture that does not acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. This is the point that Richard Hughes sought to highlight in his historical study of the Churches of Christ in America.³ But by incorporating ourselves into the Evangelical empire all of this is abandoned. And there will

³ Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

be a price to pay.⁴ The Disciples of Christ embraced Liberal Protestantism only to follow it into terminal decline. In much the same way we are following a similar course by imitating the current Evangelical embrace of popular culture. I believe it is inevitable that those who move in this direction will suffer the same fate as the Disciples as the surrounding popular culture increasingly becomes more degraded and dismissive of faith. I realize that many do not agree with this analysis. They say that the young people will look elsewhere if we do not appear contemporary. I can only say that after visiting churches on several continents I believe what attracted thoughtful people to our movement in the first place was not “generic evangelicalism” but a strong fidelity to the restoration of the teaching and practices of New Testament Christianity. In the end this is what we have to offer. If we hold to these basic convictions I do not believe we have reason to fear. The gospel will never be popular but it always gains a hearing. By this we live or die.

Academic Theology in an Ecumenical Setting

In 1967, after finishing a Master’s degree at ACU in Biblical and Patristic Greek, I enrolled in Yale Divinity School. For the next five years I studied within the circles of mainline Protestantism. While finishing my graduate work at Vanderbilt I taught a regular course on New Testament Greek and exegesis. Since that time I have actively continued my involvement with academic theology through scholarly writing and engagement in SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) and SNTS (International Society for New Testament Studies). I wish to highlight two particular areas of research that attract most ongoing interest and attention.

Eschatology

I have always believed that if Christianity is to be viable it must say something useful about the life beyond; otherwise, it is not worth much. Of course reflective analysis on such matters needs to be pursued in a wider

⁴ My clearest statement on this issue is “Churches of Christ Meet the Evangelicals: A Review Essay,” *Christian Studies* 19 (2003), 71–78.

context. This would include such areas as Jewish beliefs about the future, the resurrection of Jesus, and biblical and philosophical anthropology. One cannot be an expert in all of these areas. I choose to focus on the biblical witness. The fruit of this research is found in several published works, which I trust go beyond academic discussion.⁵ In my teaching in churches I find there is considerable confusion about historic Christian teaching on these matters. The church is in desperate need for teachers to think through and restate in a fresh way the biblical teaching on the last things. When one reads the Bible in its total canonical context it is amazing how much of the text is concerned with the new world God is bringing.

Gospel Studies

The first year I spent at Yale I enrolled in a yearlong graduate seminar on the Synoptic Problem taught by John Schütz. Most of the first semester involved intense analysis of William Farmer's then recently published book *The Synoptic Problem*.⁶ Later, after moving back to Texas, I became personally acquainted with Farmer and eventually was invited to join his research team. Most of the recognition I have received in international biblical scholarship comes through these associations.⁷ As noted earlier, this is not a memoir, but books could be written about the frantic round of international conferences and publications that took place mainly under Farmer's auspices in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

⁵ Allan J. McNicol, *Jesus' Direction for the Future* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996); "All Things New," *Christian Studies* 21 (2005/2006) 29–55; "Revelation," in *The Transforming Word: A One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, Mark Hamilton, et al., eds. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2009) 1063–1086, and my forthcoming work (2011) *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation* to be published by T & T Clark.

⁶ William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

⁷ The works *Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew*, Allan J. McNicol with David L. Dungan and David B. Peabody, eds. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996) and *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke*, David B. Peabody with Lamar Cope and Allan J. McNicol, eds. (Harrisburg: TPI/Continuum, 2002) represent the most accessible contributions in this area.

What have I learned from this work since the Synoptic Problem is still a problem? Not only am I convinced that there is no such thing as Q and that Mark is later than Matthew or Luke, I have come to a much deeper conviction that the study of the Gospels is foundational for the life of the church.

My interests in eschatology and the study of the gospels are not unrelated. The Gospels take us back to Jesus of Nazareth, the source of our faith. Eschatology moves us forward forcing us to frame what we believe will be ultimately accomplished through God's coming in Jesus Christ. Between the two (past and future) we continue to live in the church: the body of Christ. To me it is only through life lived in the church that these concerns about past and future make sense. The Stone-Campbell movement with its strong doctrine of the church has underscored this important reality.

Conclusion

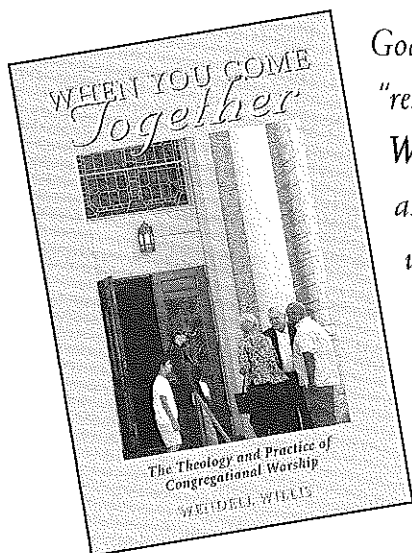
This has been a brief retrospective summary of major concerns that have grounded my work. But it would be out of place if I did not express on this occasion my deep gratitude for the support of the many friends of Austin Graduate School of Theology, my academic home for almost four decades. Successive administrations, always helpful staff, and faculty colleagues, who are not only friends, but always challenge me to do my best work, are deeply appreciated. The Board of Trustees remains a constant source of encouragement. One cannot mention them all. But several friends of the School such as A. B. Cox, Claude Hocott, William Shive, O. J. Weber, and Ike Summerlin, all who have passed to their reward, are especially worthy of mention. It was persons like these who made Austin Grad what it is today. All of these men loved both the church and the academy. They believed that Christianity, at its best, had nothing to fear from allowing Christian scholars to pursue their work and publish their results in an atmosphere of full freedom. In this way the academy was truly the servant of the church. In a time when this was under challenge in some quarters these men stepped forward courageously and unreservedly supported this enterprise. We owe them and their friends a debt of gratitude.

After Karl Barth made his visit to America he was asked what he thought about this country. According to one account, he responded, “Fantastic!”⁸ Allowing for Barth’s healthy appreciation for the world and all that is within it, this response, even if apocryphal, is understandable. As an Australian who has spent his working life “abroad” in America, Barth’s comment rings particularly true. America, for all of the criticism (not the least coming from many of its own citizens), remains the model for the rest of the world of how Christianity can thrive in a free-church setting.⁹ I remain grateful to be privileged to observe and participate in many of the liveliest theological conversations in both Stone-Campbell circles and the wider ecumenical community over the past several decades. Whatever small contributions I have made pale in significance to the “fantastic experience” of it all.

⁸ Hans W. Frei, “Karl Barth—Theologian” in *Karl Barth and the Future of Theology*, ed. David L. Dickerman (New Haven: Yale Divinity School Association, 1969), 5.

⁹ This is a major thrust of the recent book of Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

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A Written Legacy:
A Bibliography for Allan J. McNicol

M. Todd Hall

Nearly forty years ago, a young New Testament scholar from Australia arrived in Austin fresh out of graduate school. He had been offered an appointment to the Biblical Studies Center, a Bible chair serving the University of Texas, sponsored by the University Avenue Church of Christ. In his own words, “Little was I to know, or even conceive, that I would be here for the entirety of my academic career.”

Together with his colleagues, Allan McNicol has shepherded Austin Graduate School of Theology—in all of its iterations—through times of plenty and times of crisis. In all of those years, he has been a beloved colleague, scholar, friend, teacher, and mentor. Above all Allan has been a faithful disciple, fulfilling his ministry of scholarly service to the church.

We who have worked with Allan over the years have interacted with him in different ways. Scholars have noted his careful attention to detail and his determination to let evidence guide his conclusions, even though they are sometimes unpopular. The church has learned from his concern for faithfulness to biblical practice—from his reflection on the hermeneutic of Churches of Christ to his fresh exposition of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Students have benefited from his rigorous and insightful instruction in combination with his deeply pastoral heart.

Here we intend to make a record of some of Allan’s most important contributions as a doctor of the church. These reflect Allan’s work as directed toward each of the audiences mentioned above. This is not a comprehensive

bibliography. We present here a sample of the written legacy that Allan has left for the school, the church, students, and the guild of New Testament study.

Neither does this list capture the heart of Allan McNicol. It does not show his pastoral concern over the years for his students. Many of his students have learned firsthand of his willingness to sit for hours and advise them in distress—both academic and personal. These moments are not recorded below. Nor are those acts of personal piety and compassion that have filled his crown with stars. It is hoped that readers will recognize in this list a heart for the church. Those of us who have known Allan will remember that the faith he discloses in these works is not merely academic—Allan has lived out the story he has been teaching his students for forty years.

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Allan occasionally reminisces about Yale Divinity School. His memories include observing distinguished church historian Roland Bainton sketching colleagues during faculty lunches. While Austin Grad does not have a Roland Bainton, one of Allan's colleagues rendered this sketch during a faculty lunch. It is presented here with respect and appreciation for years of collegial friendship.

MRW

OBITER DICTA

Amazement

Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God. Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement; get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually; to be spiritual is to be amazed.

Abraham Heschel, *Between God and Man*

Christian Retailing

Christian retailing has accomplished its goal of getting the word out: enlisting consumers to wear T-shirts and jewelry as fishers of people, and enlisting golfers to use witnessing golf balls. The message being heard, however, might not be the one intended. The true message of the cross it seems, is getting lost in a sea of commerce.

Stephen J. Nichols, *Jesus Made in America*

Faithful Service

As the one who was the Servant of God gave himself . . . in love for God and others without asking what he personally would get out of it, so will his body and its members give (and find) themselves—even if the result is failure and not success, weakness and not power, a cross and not a crown.

Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*

God's Love for the World

God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with the pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*

Living in the World

[I]t is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world. That, I think, is faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*

Patriotism

"My country, right or wrong," no patriot would think of saying. . . . It is like saying "My mother, drunk or sober." No doubt if a decent man's mother took to drink he would share her troubles to the last; but to talk as if he would be in a state of gay indifference as to whether his mother took to drink or not is certainly not the language of men who know the great mystery.

G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant*

Relativism

The relativism which is not willing to speak about truth but only about "what is true for me" is an evasion of the serious business of living. It is the mark of a tragic loss of nerve in our contemporary culture. It is a preliminary symptom of death.

Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

Remembrance

A moss-covered headstone in San Marcos, Texas reads:

March 28, 1884. As husband, father, friend and neighbor he was above reproach. For many years a professed disciple of Christ, his daily life gave lucid proof that he was sincerely one—in Church relation a Methodist, but in spirit he was a catholic Christian, whose sympathies warmly embraced the whole Israel of God—All communions mourn him gone, and on all of them may his mantle fall.

Scientism

There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact.

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

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