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<i>FOREWORD</i>	4
<i>ARTICLES</i>	
“THIS IS THE COVENANT IN MY BLOOD” THE LORD’S SUPPER, PASSOVER, AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY R. Mark Shipp	5
IN REMEMBRANCE OF JESUS Allan J. McNicol	15
SHALLOWS AND DEPTHS THE RISE OF (POST) MODERN IMAGES OF HUMANITY Michael R. Weed	29
CHURCHES OF CHRIST WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE OUGHT TO BE Everett Ferguson	41
<i>SERMONS</i>	
IDENTITY AND VOCATION Paul Watson	53
THREE THINGS THAT MATTER Jeffrey Peterson	61
<i>BOOK REVIEW</i>	
SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ON WOMEN OCCASIONAL ADVICE OR NORM FOR THE AGES? Reviewed by Allan McNicol	69
<i>OBITER DICTA</i>	75
<i>CONTRIBUTORS</i>	79

Foreword

Every era brings its own challenges and opportunities to the church and to the life of faith. In this regard, our time is no different from any other. And yet the particular issues of the present age are ours to face and to do so responsibly. For us to acquit ourselves well entails informed and prayerful reflection. The collection of essays in this issue of *Christian Studies* are presented with the intention of stimulating Christian thought and conversation.

Words of thanks are due to Everett Ferguson and Paul Watson, long-time friends of the graduate school, for their contributions to this issue of *Christian Studies*.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

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“This is the Covenant in My Blood”

The Lord’s Supper, Passover, and Christian Community

R. Mark Shipp

Increasing attention has been given by Christians in recent years to the roots of the Lord’s Supper in the Old Testament Passover. Recently, the *Austin American Statesman* devoted the front pages of its *Metro* and *State* sections to this phenomenon:

In the past decade, many Christians nationwide have begun observing the Jewish Passover, which falls during the Easter season. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus’ last meal is recorded as a Passover observance.

Mainline Christians who observe Passover say it gives them a chance to connect with their religious heritage.¹

The same issue includes two articles in the “Life and Food” section entitled “Set the Table with a New Seder Plate” and “Think All Kosher Wines are Sweet? Think Again,” both dedicated to the Passover celebration. Interest among Christians is at an all time high relative to Passover.

But what exactly is the connection between Christians and Passover? Why all of this interest in an ancient ceremony which adherents of another religion continue to practice? I think it is partially because the early Christians

¹*Austin American-Statesman*, Wednesday, April 19, 2000, section B 1.

were Jews and celebrated Jewish festivals, but it is mostly because the single ritual which binds all Christians together on a regular basis began as part of a Passover meal. Jesus took some of the elements of the Passover and redefined them forever as referring to him, to his sacrifice, and therefore central to the faith of all believers. But this new covenant in the body and blood of Jesus can be better appreciated with some attention to its background in the Exodus from Egypt and the Passover traditions. I will direct attention in the following first to a description of the elements of the Passover and their meaning and then to some signposts pointing to the significance of the of the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

The Elements of the Passover

The first Passover celebration is described in the book of Exodus, chapters 11–12. The occasion for the Passover was the tenth plague: because Pharaoh had hardened his heart, God was going to bring the final and most devastating plague upon Egypt. All of the firstborn of human and beast would be killed, except for those who smeared the blood of a lamb on their door posts. In chapter 12, the Israelites are commanded to kill one unblemished lamb per household, smear its blood around the door, and roast the lamb without breaking its legs. They were to eat it in a hurry, with their feet shod and their staff in their hand, prepared to leave on their journey. The prescribed meal on the first Passover night and all subsequent ones also included unleavened bread (the symbol of the haste with which Israel went out from Egypt, because there was no time for bread to rise; leaven, *hametz*, was later understood to be symbolic of sin) and bitter herbs, the reason for the eating of which is not given, but ancient tradition attributes to the bitterness of Egyptian bondage. The feast of Passover has always been associated also with the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread, the seven days following the Passover, in which they were to eat unleavened bread and no leaven was to be found in their houses.

The Passover celebration became more complex and attracted many traditions following these simple origins. Indeed, modern Jews acknowledge three different Passovers: the one time, un-repeatable *Egyptian Passover*, the Passover sporadically celebrated during the period of the monarchy, and the *Passover of the Generations*, continuously celebrated for the past two thousand years and more. At the time of Christ, the Jews seemed to have reclined at table in the Roman manner and ate lettuce or parsley dipped in salt water as a pre-dining *hors d'oeuvre*. Likewise, at some point developed the symbolic drinking of several cups of wine, possibly three in the first century A. D. and later on four. The after dinner *afikomen*, derived probably from a Greek word for dessert, eventually became one of the three flat unleavened cakes baked and withheld until after the meal.

No one knows exactly when all the ceremonies, prayers, food items, and songs of the modern Passover Seder first began. Many of them are no doubt ancient, based upon what we can learn from the third century A. D. *Mishnah*. Today, prayers are prayed and hymns are sung. The pre-meal *karpas* is today usually lettuce dipped in salt. Four small cups of wine are consumed. The meaning of the wine, not found in the biblical Passover narrative, is understood differently in different Jewish traditions. Most understand the wine to represent joy of redemption, although there is an ancient tradition among some Jews relating the wine to the blood of the Passover lamb. Three flat, unleavened cakes of *matzoh* are eaten in stages during the meal. All understand these to be symbolic of the exodus. The *haroseth*, an apple sauce, cinnamon sticks, and raisin dish, is a staple in a modern observance, symbolizing the bricks and mortar the Israelites made in Egypt. The *maror*, or bitter herbs, often include horseradish paste, parsley, radishes, or endives, and are eaten with *matzoh* as a kind of sandwich. They symbolize the bitterness of Israel's service in Egypt. Lamb is not always eaten at a modern Jewish Seder; rather, the shank bone of a lamb is displayed

prominently on the Passover plate. This is because of the lack of temple sacrifices and the ability to sacrifice the lamb to be consumed. Also, the Passover plate includes a hard boiled egg, symbolizing a temple sacrifice, the *hagiga*. This egg has come over into modern practice at Easter and was originally known as the *pasche* or Passover egg. Modern Jews still recline at table or sit relaxed upon cushions in the manner of free men.

The Signposts of Passover

A simple listing of the elements of the Passover does not do justice to their symbolism and power to evoke memory and constitute a community of faith. This morning I want to focus upon four signposts which point to the significance of the Passover: the Passover as *memorial*, the Passover as *identification*, the Passover as *torah* or instruction, and the Passover as *eschatological feast*.

The first is the Passover as a *memorial*. This is the simplest level of understanding the Passover. The Israelites were to remember the events which the Passover commemorated, for

Moses said to the people, “Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place; no leavened bread shall be eaten.” (Ex 13:3)

The kind of memorial which this represents, however, is not just a “bringing to mind.” Notice the passage just cited. Remembering the Passover and the events of Exodus required more than just cognition. It required *observance*, attention to worship and ethical consequences.

This day shall be for you a memorial day and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever. (Ex 12:14)

How were the Israelites to remember their bondage and redemption? By observing the memorial, by keeping the feast, by removing all leaven and refraining from eating it during the course of the feast.

The second signpost of the Passover is *identification*. We are told by

mythologists that the nature of ritual is to bring foundational events of the past up close, to re-enact them, to identify with those foundational events. Likewise, no Israelite was to think of the Passover as an event which happened to his ancestors, but rather to *him*, personally.

When your son asks you in time to come, “What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?”

Then you shall say to your son, “*We* were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” (Deut 6:20, 21)

The very nature of the Passover is the identification of the participant with the events of the Passover and Exodus through the ritual meal. No Israelite was allowed to exclude himself. Notice a literal translation of the words of Deut 5:2, 3:

The Lord our God made a covenant with *us* at Horeb. *Not* with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with *us, we, these ones, here, today, all of us, alive.*

There are eight qualifications in the last sentence, forcing contemporization and identification with the past. But how can Moses make this claim? On the surface of it, it is absurd. None were alive in the plains of Moab who had experienced the events of Passover and Sinai except for Caleb, Joshua, and Moses. In another sense, however, the fundamental claim of Exodus and Deuteronomy is that each Israelite *must* include him or herself in the company of those in Egypt and Sinai *as if* he or she was in fact present. And so the covenant and ritual are forever renewed, with each generation, each act of participation. As with the covenant renewal of each generation of Israelites, so too with the Passover. The *Mishnah* requires that each Jew confess that it was not our fathers which were in Egypt, but I myself suffered under bondage, was passed over by the destroying angel, and ate hastily of the Passover meal. Jews were not allowed to make the celebration of the Passover a museum piece or archival oddity. The events of Egypt became forever

contemporary in the identification of Jews with those events through the celebration of the Passover.

The third signpost is that of *instruction*. The Passover was in many ways the most significant of Israel's festivals. It celebrated the greatest act of redemption in the Old Testament, which led to the constitution of Israel as the people of God. The story of that Passover and redemption had to be *told*, it had to be repeated and taught to each new generation of Israelites. It did this through the Passover *haggadah*, the recitation of the story of Passover, songs, prayers, and the consumption of symbolic foods. The central part of the Passover Seder is the asking of the four questions by the youngest child present and the responses which are given. The celebration of the Passover is highly pedagogical. It is intended to pass on the faith of those who were also "in Egypt" to each successive generation of Israelites.

The final signpost pointing to the significance of Passover is that it was an *eschatological feast*. I use eschatological here to mean that from the earliest times, Passover looked not only to the past as a memorial, not only to the present as instruction, but also to the future in hope. Ex 12:42 says

It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

As the Israelites maintained a vigil on Passover night, awaiting the coming day and their redemption from Egyptian bondage, so too Jews of every age have celebrated the Passover as a night of watching and expectation of coming redemption. In modern celebrations, a place is set for Elijah and the door is left open for him, should he appear. For hundreds of years, the phrase "Next year in Jerusalem!" has been intoned. The Passover looks forward to coming redemption as well as to the past.

The Passover and the Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal he celebrated

with his disciples. Without going into needless detail, several elements of the Passover Seder as described in the *Mishnah* are present in the Synoptic accounts. The bread which he broke was, of course, the *matzoh* of the Passover meal. The sop in which he dipped was probably the salt water, dipped into with the *karpas*. The cup which he blessed was probably the third cup, after the meal, the most holy one of redemption. It is interesting that there is no washing of hands recorded in the Synoptics, an integral part of the Passover; instead, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Psalms and other songs, especially the *Hallel* of Psalms 113–118, were sung at Passover since antiquity and this is also mentioned in the Gospel account.

But there are important differences. Some have contended that Jesus is not reinterpreting the Passover elements at all, but rather the Hebrew blessing at the end of a meal. The Passover was indeed a meal and Jesus did indeed institute the Supper during the celebration of the Passover. It seems clear to me that Jesus took some of the available imagery from the Passover and reinterpreted them in light of his own act of redemption.

First, Jesus took the unleavened bread and broke it. He also redefined its meaning: “This is my body, given for you.” The bread symbolized the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt and was symbolic of the exodus event itself. In a real way, through his sacrifice Jesus himself became the new way out, the exodus, from spiritual bondage. Allusion is made to this in Luke 9:31, which speaks of Jesus' *exodus* which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

The cup after dinner likewise he blessed and commanded them to drink it saying in Matthew 26, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” There are two possibilities for this association of Jesus' own blood with the Passover cup. First, the cup was understood to symbolize joy and salvation and the third cup was called the “cup of redemption.” Some ancient Passover traditions also associate the

wine of the Passover with the blood of the Passover lamb, although this was not universally understood. In other words, the cup symbolized joy and redemption and in some circles the sacrificial blood of the Passover lamb.

While these ideas may be in some ways illumine Jesus' appropriation of the wine, he quotes a passage from another context than that directly relating to Passover. In Ex 24:8, Moses institutes the covenant at Sinai with these words:

And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

In taking the cup of redemption, Jesus reinterpreted it and connected it with the ratification in blood of the Sinai covenant. In like manner, his blood instituted a new covenant, a covenant also ratified with sacrifice. Perhaps it is significant that Jesus reinterpreted two elements of the Passover as relating to a new exodus from bondage and a new covenant in his own blood.

What of the four signposts of the Passover? How do they relate to the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper? I think much in every way. If Jesus is understood to be our Paschal lamb, then analogously the Lord's Supper is a kind of Passover meal. We observe it as a *memorial*, first of all. Luke 22:9 says this in the most familiar manner:

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this *in remembrance* of me."

1 Corinthians 11 suggests that the memorial involves self examination and has ethical consequences.

Likewise, the Lord's Supper implies an *identification* with the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the same way that Jews were not at liberty to trivialize the Passover by making it ancient, irrelevant history, so followers of Jesus are brought near to his sacrifice through the participation in the Lord's Supper:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)

The old spiritual asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” We, like the Passover celebrants of old must say, “Yes, we were there!” And through the participation in the one body of Christ we proclaim ourselves one body of believers as well.

The Lord’s Supper is also *pedagogical*. Paul says in 1 Corinthians,

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread.

Like the Passover feast, the Lord’s Supper is intended to be passed on. It is part of the Christian Torah: we teach and proclaim through it’s observance. The Lord’s Supper is one of the most significant ways of passing on the faith and connects us with believers in the past and those who will come after us. Note the closing lines from the hymn “In Christ Redeemed, in Christ Restored”:

And thus that dark betrayal night,
With the last advent we unite
By one bright chain of loving rite
Until he come.

Finally, the Lord’s Supper is an *eschatological feast*. Paul says it best in 1 Cor 11:26:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

For us, too, the meal is one of eager expectation and waiting. For us, too, it is the down payment on the eschatological banquet to come. The periodic observance of the Lord’s supper is a proclamation of a past redemption with future orientation. We proclaim what happened in the past because it has implications for our present and our future.

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In Remembrance of Jesus

Allan McNicol

Carved across the front of the communion tables in many churches are the words, “Do This in Remembrance of Me.” Those of us whose ancestry in the Restoration Movement goes back a way, vividly recall the countless times we have looked at these words and have pondered their significance.

Indeed, if there are any words that we have talked about and considered more in connection with our observance of the Lord’s Supper one would be hard put to say what they are. It is no accident that among us the Lord’s Supper, invoking the image of memory, is referred to as a “memorial feast.”

Anyone familiar with Churches of Christ would agree that the imagery of memory of the sacrifice of Christ is central to our worship experience at the Lord’s Table.

But perhaps we are getting a little ahead of ourselves. In an age when the worship wars have centered on debates as to what extent current cultural practices in music and ethos should be welcomed in the assembly, some may well ask, “Why are we drawing attention to the Lord’s Supper?” The answer is simple. Hidden behind all the talk about the need to express our emotions and feelings in worship, especially with music, is a foundational question. How do we encounter the presence of the risen Lord in the assembly?

It may come as a surprise to some to hear the answer of the early church. Rather than in a jovial session of praise music in a great amphitheater, the traditional Christian response to this question was to say, “At the Lord’s Table!”

If true spiritual renewal is to blossom among us it surely cannot bypass the central feature of a Christian assembly—the spiritual feast at the Table of the risen Lord. During the past decade our assemblies have been bombarded constantly with changes ranging from new techniques in communication to the use of top-of-the-line technological gadgetry—claiming to assist us in sensing God’s presence in a deeper way. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong place. If the Churches of Christ are not going to catapult into some sub-set of neo-Pentecostalism we may give serious reconsideration to refocusing on an old standby—our weekly appointment at the Table of the Lord.

Our Task

In this essay we wish to renew the claim that the observance of the Lord’s Supper ought to be the central feature of the Sunday morning assembly. We will argue that for this to occur some reform will be necessary in the way that we structure our observance of the Supper. Current practices tend to obscure rather than enhance the importance of the Lord’s Supper with respect to what takes place in the assembly.

Procedurally, first we will give a précis of the worship of the early church drawing attention to the importance that believers attached to the Lord’s Meal (Supper). The topic is almost inexhaustible in scope. Our focus will be on the role of remembrance. We will argue that as a gathered remembering community, it was at the table, that the central claims of the faith were most vividly displayed by the early Christians. Second, we will explore the connection between remembering and Jesus’ presence in the Christian community today. Finally, we will conclude by making several

specific suggestions regarding the way we observe the Lord's Supper with a view toward recovering its importance in the contemporary worship experience.

The Early Christian Witness

Essentially, in the New Testament, there are two types of accounts that give us information concerning the Lord's Supper. First, in Matthew and Mark we have quite similar narratives that explain what happened at the Last Passover of Jesus' life. As part of their narration of the Last Passover there is a description of what Jesus said about the bread and the cup on the fateful night before the day of his death (Matt 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26). These words are connected with a sequence of events leading up to his impending death. Thus, for Matthew and Mark, the Last Supper (Passover Meal) is noted as one more link (very significant to be sure) in a chain of events that make up the last days of the story of Jesus' Life: a building block in the account of his biography.

On the other hand, the account given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, (and also Luke), pictures what happened at the Last Supper somewhat differently.¹ Both Paul and Luke understand these events as a “founding account.”² In other words something took place there that was the first in

¹ The key differences in the wording between the authors of the Synoptic Gospels and Paul are compiled in many different secondary works. For a handy analysis one may consult I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 30–56.

² One difference between Paul and Luke is that Luke, as the other Synoptics, sets the institution of the Lord's Supper in Jesus' observance of the Passover feast the night before he was crucified (Luke 22:1, 7–13, 15, 20). However, there is no reference to the Passover in Paul's founding account in 1 Cor 11:23b–25. The reference to the “cup of blessing” in 1 Cor 10:16 is thought by some to be an echo of a Passover meal. But the terminology is common for an expression for thanks when a cup of wine is passed during a formal meal even beyond Judaism. Cf. Otfried Hofius, “The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Supper Tradition: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 11:23b–25,” in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts* NGS 6 (ed. Ben F. Meyer: Macon: Georgia: Mercer

what would become a long stream of numerous repetitions of a religious observance. For Luke and Paul, Jesus sets up the prototype or model for how we are “to do” the Supper. At the heart of this is the traditional wording, “Do This in Remembrance of Me.” It is found only in Luke and Paul (Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24, 25). Indeed, the text of 1 Cor 11:25 is quite striking. In connection with the cup saying the text says, “Do this, as often as you drink (i.e., the cup) for the purpose of remembering me.”

Now this is all well and good. But the question remains (even for those who observe the command week after week, year after year), how do you do this? How do we go about remembering a past action so that it is more spiritually satisfying than just a mental remembering or imagining of the events of the last days of Jesus? To deal with this issue, it is time to go below the surface to see in more detail what ancient believers considered to be involved with the phrase: “Do this for the purpose of remembering me.”

“Do This in Remembrance of Me” in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

Paul’s “founding account” of the Supper (1 Cor 11:23b–25) occurs as part of a wider discussion of a problem that had emerged in the church at Corinth. Believers gathered in a home on Sunday Evening for a meal together. The textual discussion (1 Cor 11:17–22) indicates that this meal was similar to a kind known widely in the Greco-Roman world as an *eranos* (where the host provides the space but the guests supply the food).³ The gathering would commence with a prayer for the bread which functioned as a profession of thanks to God for providing the loaf—a vital form of sustenance. After the

University, 1993), 85. At least, as far as Paul is concerned, any connection between the Lord’s Supper and the Passover is not highlighted.

³ It has some similarity with the “Potluck” dinner that is very popular in many congregations today. However, it seemed that at Corinth the believers ate only the food which they brought. This meant that some (especially the wealthy) had a far more commodious table than others. Understandably this became a point of contention.

meal the meeting ended with a similar expression said over the cup. Apparently, since some had better provisions than others at the house-meeting divisions occurred. This resulted in some being shamed and marginalized in their participation of the Lord's meal. Paul considered this an outrage and gave instructions to rectify the situation. At the conclusion of what he had to say, he urged all to treat one another with kindness appropriate to an event that rehearsed the center of the Christian story (1 Cor 11:33).⁴

The "founding account," then, is given as the basis for Paul's instruction. It is in this "founding account" that the words on remembrance occur and to which shortly we will direct our attention.

Paul narrates that he received from the tradition that on the night Jesus was betrayed he took bread, and after having given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This *is* my body which is on behalf of you" (1 Cor 11:23b–24a). A wording of similar length, "This cup *is* the new covenant in my blood" was pronounced after taking the cup (1 Cor 11:25a). These words are known as the words of bestowal. What is crucial to grasp is the *connection* made between the words of bestowal and actions of Jesus and the participation by the disciples which took place subsequently. For Paul, Jesus is saying that the bread and its subsequent eating *is* or *bestows* a participation or share in the benefits of the crucified body of Jesus on the cross (cf. 1 Cor 10:16); and, likewise, sharing the cup indicates an acceptance of Jesus' offer to bestow the benefits of the new covenant inaugurated by his death. In brief, as Otfried Hofius has noted with respect to what Paul is saying here:

⁴ The translation "wait for another" in 1 Cor 11:33 is very unfortunate. A better translation of 1 Cor 11:33 is "Thus my brethren, when you come together to eat *show hospitality to one another*." See further the comments in my article "Lord's Supper" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (editor-in-chief David Noel Freedman: Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 822–824.

Whoever eats the eucharistic bread and drinks the eucharistic cup receives and so has a share in the salvation that has been settled by the expiatory death of Christ.⁵

Of course, for Jesus, Paul, or the earliest Christians, these words of bestowal were not understood to entail any change in the substance or nature of the material bread and fruit of the vine on the table. Rather these words of bestowal functioned as a prayer (Paul uses the word *eucharistein* = “to give thanks”) consecrating the elements of the bread and cup to be spiritual food and drink for the believing community. In daily life food consecrated by prayer for the purposes of nourishing our bodies does not change materially as a result of the prayer. Likewise, The bread and cup at the Lord’s meal becomes sanctified spiritual food (without material change). Participation of this food enables the believer to claim a share in the benefits of Jesus’ death.⁶

How do the bread and the cup function as spiritual food? The answer to this question involves acquiring some appreciation for the biblical concept of remembrance. In the “founding account” of the Lord’s meal after the words of bestowal *both* with the bread and the cup, comes an additional statement, “Do *this* for the purpose of remembering me” (1 Cor 11:24, 25).

We have been conditioned by over familiarity not to pay special attention to the antecedent of “this” (Greek *touto*). Indeed if we think of it at all we refer the “this” to the entire observance of the Lord’s Supper as an ordinance for the church. Understanding “this” in the latter sense we run into considerable difficulty. For, as we have noticed, the Lord’s Supper in the earliest Christian community was a full meal. If the “this” refers to all

⁵ Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 99.

⁶ The process of sanctifying material things for a spiritual purpose is explained by Everett Ferguson, “The Lord’s Supper in Church History: The Early Church Through the Medieval Period” in *The Lord’s Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*, ed. D.R. Stoffer (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1997), 21–22.

that Paul presumed was operative in Corinth then on what grounds do we separate a concentration on the bread and the cup from the whole meal?⁷ And this is a command!

But, on taking a closer look, there is a more obvious antecedent to the “(do) this” of 1 Cor 11:24, 25. That antecedent is Jesus’ action in taking the bread, giving thanks, breaking it and distributing it with the words of bestowal (cf. Luke 22:19). The context to which the phraseology of remembrance has been appended, refers to the total action of Jesus at the table culminating in the words of bestowal over the bread and the cup. At the center of these actions of Jesus are two prayers of thanksgiving. As will be noted below, the prayers of thanksgiving involved a recital of the “founding event” of salvation. Their very expression was to be for the purpose of “remembering.”

And not just, “remembering” the event at Calvary as a thing in itself. As countless presiders at the table have reminded us, the biblical concept of memory goes far beyond a mere memorial ceremony. Based on the entire story of God’s faithfulness to his creation in the call of Abraham, Exodus, the sustaining of a special people through all sorts of perils, and finally in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the church comes to the table with rich memories of the history of salvation. This memory is to be invoked in the prayers over the bread and cup. It presumes that in the wording of these prayers we draw upon the Hebrew concept of “remembering” (Hebrew *zekher/zikaron*).⁸ This not only involves a recital of the history of salvation as though one was present at the original event but, even more, that we use

⁷ This problem cannot be overcome simply by quoting 1 Cor 11:34. The generally received understanding of this text is not that Paul is advocating any change in the practice of the Corinthians but that the Lord’s meal is not the place to bring an excess supply of food for some kind of major repast.

⁸ In the Greek Bible *anamnēsis*.

recital of sacred history to integrate and re-assemble the fractured pieces of our own lives into the tapestry of God's wider story of his people and their purpose in history⁹. As with the psalms one *remembers* by *proclaiming* the marvelous deeds of the one who brings our salvation.¹⁰ Therefore the remembrance of Christ takes place not only in the word of the presider and the actions of breaking the bread and pouring the cup at the table but most significantly in the prayers of thanksgiving for the bread and cup. Indeed, Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth, "for as often as you carry on this practice you *proclaim* the Lord's death (the true significance of the events at Calvary) until he comes" (I Cor 11:26). Thus Paul is very concerned that the communal life of the Corinthian church conforms with the rhetoric of their prayers where Jesus is invoked as the one who committed himself for others even to the death of the cross.

By understanding "remembrance" as a dynamic process of continuing to claim a share in the benefits of Jesus' death, resulting in a continual reassessment and reintegration of our lives, we transcend the banal idea held by some that the Lord's Supper is simply "meeting a requirement." Rather, the Lord's Supper is the connecting link with the only true source of nourishment for our spiritual lives. The German scholar Gerhard Lohfink says it well.

How crucial memory is. The life of the people of God depends on it. In this sense the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is not a luxury that the baptized can permit themselves according to their own mood or convenience, but

⁹ In an unpublished paper Rabbi David Stern, entitled "Remembering and Redemption," speaking of the Passover Seder (recital), the Hebrew analogue to the Christian expression of thanks for the bread and cup says, "The ultimate goal of the Seder . . . for all of its drama of identification, is not to make the Exodus contemporaneous to the participant. The identification with the story is only a vehicle. The goal is to remember the reality of redemption: to re-assemble our own world-view in accord with the Haggadah's progression from degradation to dignity, to reintegrate into our lives the reality of a God who hears the cry of the oppressed."

¹⁰ As for example in Pss 77:12; 105:1-5; and 114:4.

sometimes they can just as easily do without. The Sunday celebration is a necessity of life, for after at most a week the community is in danger of losing its memory. The continual erosion of memory and the constant danger of individual isolation work against the constant memory of the eucharistic celebration.¹¹

Our appearance at the Lord's Table represents a continual elongation of what took place on the night before Jesus died. In this feast of remembrance we not only claim the benefits of the death of Christ but pledge anew that we may live a life worthy of the commitment that Christ displayed in the giving of his life. In this sense we replicate the situation of the twelve who gathered around Jesus on the fateful night before his death and stand in direct continuity with them.

Jesus' Presence With Us Today

Jaroslav Pelikan would regularly say in his lectures that from the earliest days when Christians gathered together "it would always be around a table of some sort." Believers have always considered that their observance of the Lord's meal was in direct continuity with the Last Supper. If this is the case in what sense do we conceive that Jesus was and is present in the later communities? Tragically this became, and remains today, a divisive issue among believers.

Interestingly enough, for the New Testament writers it was not a point of contention. For example, there is no compelling evidence in the New Testament to indicate that Paul considered that Jesus was present in the Supper in any way that was different from his abiding presence through the Spirit in the early Christian community.¹² Probably the writer of the Gospel of John considered that observance of the Supper played a very important

¹¹ Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church: Toward a Theology of the People of God*. (trans. Linda Maloney: Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 1999), 252.

¹² As noted by Hofius, "The Lord's Supper," 100.

role for the spiritual life of the community (John 6:52–59). But again, this Gospel does not indicate that eating the bread and drinking the cup was the crucial determinative factor that made available the presence of the Son.¹³

Somewhere along the line things took a different turn. More and more the focus came on “when” and “how” the true or real presence of Christ was realized at the table.¹⁴ In the West the “when” of the real presence came in the eucharistic prayer of consecration. The “how” came in the transformation of the bread and wine into the real “unbloodied” presence of

¹³ This is not to deny that the early Christians believed in the presence of Christ at the eucharistic meal in the assembly. Hints of this are found in the Johannine writings, especially in Revelation. We know that the book of Revelation was to be read aloud to the churches (Rev 1:3, 4). If the book were read in installments in the assembly, (as some think), then it is interesting to note that key references to the risen Lord coming to his people, couched in compatible eucharistic terminology, occur at key intervals in the book (Rev 2:7, 17; 3:20; 7:16; 11:17; 14:14–20; 19:7, 9; 22:20, 21). Perhaps these references are signals to the congregation to end the reading of an installment and participate in the Supper. But, even granted that this view is plausible, there is no direct connection made between Jesus’ presence being dependent upon a particular procedure in the liturgy. Nevertheless, many in ancient Christianity saw a close connection between the bread and the cup and the presence of Jesus. In the early second century Ignatius of Antioch argued that since it was critical to believe that the Son of God was present among us in “flesh and blood” during his earthly life, and after his resurrection (Luke 24:39), then at the table his presence was just as real as earlier (Ignatius *To the Smyrneans* 7:1). This idea, fueled especially by the invocation of the words, “This is my body,” became well-traveled in the church. Other important teachers elaborated upon it even more concretely. Justin Martyr (an important mid-second century teacher) for example, claimed that the consecrated bread and cup resulted in a similar transformation akin to the manifestation of the Logos in flesh and blood in the incarnation. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66:1, 2. Similar statements can be found in Irenaeus and the Alexandrian Theologians. Such terminology may be justifiable as long as it is used to underscore the point that Christianity is not a timeless myth but derives its validity from the historical reality of the flesh and blood crucifixion of the Son of God, who risen, comes in actuality to his community. But somewhere along the line a threshold was crossed where it became much more.

¹⁴ In popular parlance this is known as the doctrine of the “real presence”. For those in the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal (Anglican), and Lutheran traditions, this understanding is a prerequisite for a legitimate Eucharist.

Jesus on the altar.¹⁵ The entire process became known as the Eucharistic mystery.

These claims go beyond the clear teaching of Scripture. As we have seen, Paul teaches that at the Lord's Table we are nourished by spiritual food and drink that mediates to us the benefits of Christ's death. In this sense this spiritual food is the body and blood of Christ. But beyond this the bread and the cup do not signify anything special of Jesus' presence beyond his abiding power through the Spirit to rest in the life of believers in the community.

Thus the claims of these traditions that came to full flower in the medieval synthesis on the Eucharist were contested at the Reformation—especially by Zwingli and Calvin.¹⁶ As an outgrowth of the Reformed Tradition, theological thinking in Churches of Christ about the Lord's Supper has maintained reservations with regards to the eucharistic doctrine of “the real presence of Christ.” The divide is critical because it represents fundamental differences over the nature of how Jesus abides in his church. Communities that have a strong belief in the doctrine of the “real presence” occurring at a special moment at the communion table tend to conceive of the Eucharist as “the be-all and end-all” of worship. Communities that conceive of the church as a fellowship of believers empowered by the Spirit under the word celebrate the presence of Jesus in various and sundry ways in the worship. Since Churches of Christ fall into the latter category it is distressing to see many of our people (especially on liturgical days of the church year) attending Episcopal or Catholic churches and communing around their tables. Such activities not only show misunderstanding of our own

¹⁵ See William H. Willamon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship has Changed Over the Years* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1992), 54–58.

¹⁶ A.I.C. Heron, *Table and Tradition: Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the Eucharist* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 114–145. Also Marshall, “Last Supper and Lord's Supper,” who writes from a similar outlook.

beliefs about the Lord's Supper and worship in general, but also is a callous expression of disrespect for the deeply held connections of our religious neighbors who differ with us on this point.¹⁷

At the Table Today

A question is often asked, "What am I supposed to think and do when I come to the table week by week?" Is there something more besides being grateful for the once-and-for-all sacrifice at Calvary?

In this essay we have attempted to argue that when we come to the Table we do two main things.¹⁸ First, in the actions at the table, especially in the prayers of thanks for the bread and cup, and in their distribution, we both *rehearse* the redeeming acts of salvation, and through our participation, we re-affirm our claim to a share in that salvation. Through this process of remembering and proclamation our lives are reconfigured and, by the power of the Spirit, we nourish our growth in the way of salvation. Second, in the course of our engagement in this network of reality, we *pledge* anew to live lives worthy of the Gospel. Rehearsal of the sacred story, sharing in its benefits, and renewed commitment in light of it stand at the heart of our remembrance of Jesus.

¹⁷ In a fascinating article George Lindbeck, "The Eucharist Tastes Bitter in the Divided Church," *Spectrum* 19/1 (Spring, 1999): 1, 4–5, a Lutheran, explains carefully the position of those in the Catholic tradition who argue that "the Lord's Table must be fenced or it ceases to be sacred." Essentially their position is that the Eucharist, as well as being a vehicle for the divine presence, is a sign of oneness between Christ and the Catholic Church. To invite participation by those who do not share this conviction is, according to this view, to declare openly that the body of Christ is divided. This writer does not endorse this line of reasoning. But he does have respect for others who hold this view with conviction. Thus out of respect for them, he will not take the Eucharist in these contexts.

¹⁸ A third major occurrence at the table should be noted. It is at the table we beseech the Lord to bring full circle to consummation the work of new creation that was started at Golgotha. The Lord's Supper is an anticipation of the Messianic banquet of the new world. This ought to be highlighted more but the eschatological dimension of the Supper has not been the focus of this paper.

Because we do not always highlight these critical points in the way we observe the Supper, we conclude with several brief observations concerning several procedural points that would be helpful in implementing the understanding set forth in this paper.

First, it is imperative that Churches of Christ retain the table in a prominent place in the church meeting house. Architecture is important. The removal of the table leaving only a pulpit and the appearance of servers who mysteriously emerge to serve the bread and cup is not a helpful development. The crucial symmetry between word and table is overturned and the impression is left that the Lord's Supper is merely something that must be "taken care of" before the preacher comes to the pulpit. And, at the very minimum, before partaking a presider ought to replicate the process set forth in I Cor 11:23–25. Otherwise it is hard to make the case that one is "doing *this* in remembrance of Jesus."

Second, some years ago an aged and wise brother grabbed my arm after the morning service and said, "Did you notice that the person saying the prayers at the Lord's Table did not mention a word about the death of Christ!" This author has argued strongly that actions of the one presiding at the table such as breaking the bread and pouring out the cup can enhance visually what is being signified in our observance of the Supper. But, if our argumentation about the importance of the prayers at the table is correct, then it is clear that those who have responsibility in this area should be briefed as to the importance of what they do and say in the communion prayers.

Indeed, finally, the whole issue of who ought to preside at the Lord's Table is worthy of reconsideration. By the second century it was the usual practice of the church to only allow the elders to serve as president at the table. While we should resist clerical tendencies in our view of ministry (the priesthood of all believers is a blessed truth), the regular practice of an elder

standing behind the table may be a way of expressing the gravity and significance of what is taking place.

Conclusion

In this essay we have sought to show that the concept of remembrance is central for what takes place at the table. Week by week by word and action we rehearse the foundational events that provided our salvation. We claim a share in them and pledge anew our fidelity to the way of the Lord. We come to the feast because, if we do not, our memory is dimmed and we are in danger of losing the only One who matters.

Shallows and Depths

The Rise of (Post) Modern Images of Humanity

Michael R. Weed

What man tells himself he is
manifests itself soon enough in what he does
and may even predetermine what he can do.

Richard Weaver

Modern understandings of the essence of humanity and the nature of the self are the result of complex interactions of numerous social and intellectual forces. Before attempting to identify some of these, my premise is that the self is formed in the matrix of the self's encounter with the "not-self" which the self apprehends as "reality." While it is obvious that selves interpret, reinterpret, and redefine the nature and boundaries of their reality, less obvious is the fact that such interpretations, redefinitions, and reinterpretations are driven by forces which operate consciously and unconsciously.

Perhaps apparent but of critical importance is the fact that redefinitions of reality inevitably entail redefinitions of the self. While the reverse should also be true theoretically, i.e., redefinitions of the self entail redefinitions of reality, on a practical level self-consciousness and self-reflection are more intentional and sophisticated moves than the self's initial encounter with and apprehension of "external" reality (although this unquestionably presumes and is shaped by the "self"). In practice, redefinitions of the self are entailments of redefinitions of reality and not vice versa. All of which is to say that modern images of the self are more nearly dependent variables accompanying the rise of new ways of viewing reality.

The Foreshadowing of Modernity

It is customary to date the rise of modernity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By this time an identifiable revolution—an intellectual, social, and cultural upheaval of the first magnitude—was well underway. This period, the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, is one in which we can identify the foundations of modernity—basic understandings of reality and attendant views of the self.

While it is common to identify this period as shifting from dependence on faith in religious authorities, institutions, and traditions to confidence in human reason, it is less commonly noted that previous ages also highly valued reason and perhaps even placed no less value on reason. Reason, however, was differently understood prior to the Enlightenment. Classical views had tended to envision being rational as being properly attuned to the universe. The universe itself was understood as ordered by a transcendent Good existing beyond but manifested through the universe's rational order and harmony.

In Plato, for example, sensible realities derive their existence and order from the intelligible ideas behind them. Aristotle perhaps more so understood that the universe and the human self are so constituted that the pursuit of truth (use of reason) and the attainment of goodness are inseparable—one cannot truly acquire intellectual virtues without or apart from attaining moral virtues.¹ Similarly, Augustine, arguably a Christian neo-Platonist, understood heart and mind to be illuminated by and drawn to a transcendent good reflected within the order of the Creation.

The Enlightenment, and particularly Descartes, constitute a major shift in this vision of the universe and of the nature of the human self. It should be noted, however, that significant precursors of this shift were in

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13

existence well before Descartes. Robert Sokolowski, for instance, argues that a major change in the relationship between faith and reason can be seen as early as the eleventh century with Anselm (1033–1109). Whereas Anselm continued to follow Augustine and envisioned himself as believing in order to understand, he nonetheless not only used reason within faith, he also viewed faith as an object suitable for rational examination. Sokolowski states that with Anselm reason tends to “establish a distance toward faith; it seems in contrast to what it had done in previous centuries, to come out with a kind of independence, almost a claim to judgment over faith . . .”² According to Sokolowski’s analysis it remains an open question whether Anselm did in fact more than he realized and set in motion theological attempts to establish the existence of God through reason apart from antecedent belief in him.

Jesuit scholar Michael Buckley has offered a similar assessment of Thomas Aquinas. Buckley notes that Thomas, although asserting that the one way and the truth are made manifest in Christ, nonetheless argued that God’s existence is “convincingly manifested” in the five ways (classical proofs) apart from and with no mention of Christ.³ Significantly, here the commitment of faith is rendered dependent upon a prior philosophical inference regarding the existence of God.

According to Buckley, the existence of God is thus presented essentially as a philosophical problem. This, in turn, whatever Thomas’ intent (i.e., whether the *Summa* is taken as one argument or many), has a critical impact on subsequent Christian thought. Augustine’s maxim, *credo ut intelligam* (“I believe in order to understand”), is reversed and Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”) comes to function

² Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982), 6.

³ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 342.

within the context of antecedent philosophical inferences. This opens the way for philosophical prolegomena and natural theology to provide the foundation for Christian theology—and eventually to govern Christian theological reflection.

It is further significant not only that the self is envisioned as having the capability of arriving at such an inference, but also that, implicitly, Christianity as such possesses nothing with which to engage the fundamental issue of God's existence.⁴ Herein, according to Buckley, lies the origin of modern atheism, viz., the turn from confidence in Christian revelation to the certainty attained on the basis of human reason and argumentation.

Theologian William Placher finds a major change underway with the work of Aquinas' influential systematizer and interpreter, the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez (1549–1617).⁵ Suarez developed a theory of analogy and the analogical use of language which had the effect of radically altering Aquinas' own views but, due to Suarez's role as Aquinas' interpreter, was mistakenly attributed to Aquinas himself and became influential on subsequent developments of Thomistic thought. Whereas Aquinas saw analogical language as protecting the mystery and unknowability of God, Suarez's understanding of analogy leads in the opposite direction. That is, Suarez argued that we can understand how terms applied to God differ from the same terms applied to us—they do not, as Aquinas argued, limit our understanding of God. Aquinas had said, "The first cause surpasses human understanding and speech. He knows God best who acknowledges that whatever he thinks and says falls short of what God really is."⁶

Suarez, by contrast, argues that we share the property of being with

⁴ Buckley, 342.

⁵ William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 74.

⁶ As quoted in F. C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), 136.

God and therefore can attribute “being” univocally to God and to creation: God must have as much “being” as the things he creates. The analogy of attribution, so developed, now means that God’s nature can confidently be understood and explained with considerable precision.

For Placher, the influence of Suarez’s interpretation of Aquinas is the first stage in what he designates the “domestication of transcendence” largely through the “univocist drift” and its corollary—the elevation of human reason by virtue of attributing to it the capacity of comprehending God.⁷ Suarez’s views heavily influenced not only Roman Catholic thought; they also influenced Protestant theology for the next two centuries.

Whereas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin had all understood faith to consist in assurance rather than in comprehension, increasing attention to the philosophical prolegomena to theology and the use of philosophical terminology and argumentation in theological reflection inevitably had far-reaching implications.⁸ According to Placher, this influence, coupled with the pressures for clear and precise dogmatic formulations driven by doctrinal conflicts and increasing encounters with skepticism, led Protestant theologians to turn from Luther and Calvin’s understandings of transcendence and mystery to an increased dependence upon philosophical language and argumentation in both the grounding and the exposition of Christian faith. Placher, for example, cites Reformed teachers by the end of the sixteenth century contending that one must learn to understand scripture by first understanding philosophy; “Scripture speaks of life, philosophy defines it.”

Modernity: From Descartes to Kant to Nietzsche

Rene Descartes (1590–1650), arguably the initiator of modern philosophy and certainly a key contributor to modern understandings of reality, was

⁷ Placher, 76.

⁸ Placher, 68.

heavily influenced by Suarez. In the midst of intellectual and social crises accompanying the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler, the Thirty-years War, and the rising tide of French skepticism, Descartes accepted Cardinal Berulle's invitation to establish faith on a firm foundation.

Descartes sought a rational method applicable to any subject matter and capable of yielding results with the precision and certitude of mathematical calculations. He found the starting point for indubitable certainty within the self's consciousness of itself. Even the doubter, surrounded by dubitable realities, must acknowledge the existence of the thinking/doubting self—the *cogito*. From this point, Descartes, using a version of the ontological argument, undertook to establish the existence of God, arguing that God's existence is more evident than that of the world. In fact, Descartes argued that all that can be known about God can be found in and by human reason.

The immediate gains of this strategy are immense. Belief in God is accorded an intellectually defensible place apart from tradition, superstition, and ecclesiastical authority. The liabilities, however, are also considerable. Descartes' *cogito* differs significantly from Augustine's *intelligam*. Subtle and far-reaching changes distinguish the two. Whereas Augustine's *intelligam* discovered itself as immediately dependent upon God—illuminated from beyond itself,⁹ Descartes' *cogito* contains no awareness of the immediate presence of God. The existence of God is a sure and certain inference made by the self's intellectual powers that they derive from a cause which explains their existence. Immediately obvious is the shift of confidence placed at least methodologically in the powers of the *cogito* which, in principle, can know all that can be known about God. Obviously, revelation and theology are relegated to a supportive role to philosophy—in time to become for many unnecessary and irrelevant.

⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, xxxvii.2: "minds irradiated that we judge rightly."

Further, with Descartes a particular understanding of the self became deeply embedded in Western culture, which, along with its subsequent mutations, remains influential until the present.¹⁰ On examination, Descartes' *cogito*, or "thinking ego," is an artificial self, a mind abstracted from its own historicity, corporeality, and affectivity. It surveys the surrounding world with an imperialistic eye. With Descartes, the "disengaged subject stands in a place already hollowed out for God; he takes a stance to the world which befits an image of the Deity."¹¹

Descartes' own theology notwithstanding, an orientation was now set in place which, in time, would mutate not only into Deism but also into forms of religion which were no longer Christian—and were even fundamentally anti-Christian. While the First Cause and Moral Orderer of Enlightenment Deism could be seen as a rational and therefore superior understanding of the Christian God, others would find even the conceptually thinner God of Deism to be incompatible with the dignity of the thinking self and the need for free rational control of human life.

In time, first Hume and then Kant would challenge the capacity of reason—both inductive and deductive reason—to establish claims regarding supersensible realities, including deity. Through this, the rational self survives but is denied purchase on access to questions of metaphysics and transcendence. While versions of traditional morality do survive, they assume different forms and are differently anchored. For Kant, morality resides in the structure of the rational autonomous self. The rational self is morally obligated to itself and to other rational selves in order to avoid self-contradiction.

¹⁰ William Barrett, *The Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer* (New York: Anchor, 1987), 20.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1989), 315.

Kant, of course, argues that the existence of God is an implicate of practical reasoning. It is important, however, to note that Kant grounds his belief in God in his morality and not vice versa.¹² Further, the existence of God is not necessary as the source of morality or of morality's authority. Rather, Kant finds the existence of God necessary in order that the self's sense of justice can be brought to final resolution. Significantly, perhaps even prophetically, Kant asserts:

Granted that the pure moral law inexorably binds every man as a command (not as a rule of prudence), the righteous man may say: I will that there be a God . . .¹³

Arguably, the language here displaces both the conclusions of reason and the language of historic Christian faith. Kant's words, "I will that God exists," are unmistakably the language of self assertion—one of the dominant characteristics of the modern world. These words place Kant at considerable distance from Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. They even distance him from Descartes. Kant's invalidation of the proofs of the existence of God, his demonstration of the limitations of speculative reason, combined with his portrait of the dignity of the free rational man, all prepare the way for a will unbounded by external reality and unanswerable to any external criteria for

¹² Although Kant states this in numerous ways, the following is illustrative: "This is not to say that man is entitled, on the grounds of the Idea to which his conscience inevitably leads him, to posit such a Supreme Being as really existing outside himself—still less that he is obligated to do so. For the Idea is not given to him objectively, by theoretical reason, but only subjectively, by practical reason which obligates itself to act in conformity with this Idea. And only by way of analogy with a lawgiver for all rational beings in the world does this Idea merely guide man to think of conscientiousness as responsibility before a holy Being distinct from man yet present in his inmost being, and to submit himself to the will of this Being, as the rules of justice. Man's conception of religion as such is here only 'a principle regarding all his duties as if they were divine commands.'" Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals, Pt. II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 105–106.

¹³ Barrett, 101.

choice and action, a will which in time confidently asserts, "I will that there be no God." As Iris Murdoch has observed,

It is not such a very long step from Kant to Nietzsche . . . In fact, Kant's man had already received a glorious incarnation nearly a century earlier in the work of Milton: his proper name is Lucifer.¹⁴

Theological Adjustments to Modernity

Inevitably, Christian thought came to reflect the influences of new social and intellectual challenges accompanying the Reformation and Enlightenment. Anti-atheism drove many thinkers to adapt Christianity to the rationalizing temper of the age in search of an intellectually defensible faith.¹⁵ Equally important, religious wars and competing confessional claims led to the need for more convincing argumentation and clearer doctrinal distinctions which could be found in philosophical language.

In this process, however, Christian theology and the understanding of Christian faith underwent critical redefinition. By the seventeenth century, and well before David Hume, Christian theologians had accepted a distinction between "the natural" and "the miraculous," defining a miracle as "a violation of the natural order."¹⁶ This distinction, which had the effect of significantly limiting God's direct involvement in the creation, also brought attention to miracles as evidence for the truth of the Christian faith and placed them under close philosophical scrutiny.

For Placher, as the intellectual defensibility of faith becomes a central concern, traditional understandings of transcendence are redefined or "domesticated" (e.g., transcendence as "distance" rather than the mystery and otherness of God) as God is located and defined within a rational system

¹⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark, 1970), 80.

¹⁵ Cf. James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1985), 72.

¹⁶ Placher, 136f.

of clear and distinct ideas. Understandably, Christian faith comes to be understood in terms of intellectual assent more than in terms of personal trust and commitment. And, as faith is based on rational argumentation, the authority of scripture is understood to be grounded on rational argumentation—ironically leading to the paradoxical stance characterizing fundamentalist arguments regarding the authority of scripture, viz., scripture is the sole authority for faith and practice; its authority is irrefutably established on the basis of rational argumentation.¹⁷

The Modern Ethos

Intellectual developments do not occur in isolation from their broader cultural surroundings. The underlying ethos within which all of this transpires is one marked by the simultaneous break-up of ecclesiastical hegemony over European social and political life and the scientific-technological explosion which transformed everyday life throughout European cities and villages. Between the opening of the sixteenth century and the close of the nineteenth, the steeple on the church, visible from the surrounding fields, ceased to govern the shared vision of reality and to order civic life. Rather, the center of everyday life become the public clock and, in time, the factory whistle. The guiding vision of reality came to be that of the universe as a vast machine composed of smaller interlocking machines.

The rapid advance of science and countless new technologies offered visible evidence of the awesome power of the human mind; it also inevitably led to a shift away from dependence upon ecclesiastical authority to confidence in human ability to understand and harness the forces of nature. The successes of the new sciences inspired a vision of inevitable progress and evoked

¹⁷ While a complete discussion of modernity should include the Romantic Movement (1780–1830), it is not inaccurate to envision Romanticism, both non-Christian and Christian versions, as reacting to, expanding, but not totally rejecting basic Enlightenment presuppositions. Schleiermacher and Coleridge, for example, would be impossible to understand apart from Kant.

utopian hopes. For many, science and the new technologies, rather than the church, were expected to “wipe away all tears.”

This climate was clearly at odds with many of the central tenets of the Christian faith. Questions were raised, for example, regarding the relationship of reason and revelation—even the need for revelation. Questions were raised about the uniqueness of the Christian religion, the significance of Jesus, original sin, and other fundamental Christian beliefs.

As already indicated, while many theologians reacted to explicit problems and challenges posed by the Enlightenment mindset, many of these very same theologians had already unknowingly adopted the Enlightenment beliefs and attitudes. Still others, of course, eagerly and knowingly embraced the new knowledge.

Alienated from Ourselves

Early in the twentieth century, Max Scheler noted that in the modern era of unprecedented scientific and technological accomplishment, “man is more of a problem to himself . . . than ever before in all recorded history.”¹⁸ Under the dominance of scientific and technological successes, the tools for perception and self-understanding have been reduced to those available through “instrumental reason.”¹⁹ Thus restricted, modern interpretations inevitably mask the depths of reality and therein conceal from the self its own profundity. Not surprisingly, today shallow and truncated versions of the meaning of the human and the nature of the self abound. Consequently, we moderns find ourselves trapped in a condition of ever-increasing self-estrangement, alienated from ourselves by the very instruments we have so

¹⁸ Max Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature* (Boston: Beacon, 1958, orig. 1928), 4.

¹⁹ Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991).

successfully employed to master the environment. Hans-Georg Gadamer offers both a sober warning and a difficult challenge:

Only by the demythologization of science (which controls what is proper to it but cannot know the one whom it serves) can the mastery of knowledge and ability become self-mastery. The Delphic demand "Know thyself" meant, "Know that you are a man and no god." It holds true as well for human beings in the age of the sciences, for it stands as a warning before all illusions of mastery and domination.²⁰

Until we find the courage to face and unmask our "illusions of mastery and domination," our apprehension of reality will remain diminished and our efforts to understand ourselves will remain tantalizingly unfulfilled.

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT, 1993), 150.

Churches of Christ

*Who We Are and What We Ought to Be**

Everett Ferguson

The title suggested to me was, “Churches of Christ—Where We Are and Where We are Going.” I passed on that. I try to be a historian, and historians, although we are reluctant to admit it, are not good at contemporary analysis and are notoriously poor prophets. I accept responsibility for the present title, but not responsibility to meet your expectations for the title.

This will not be a statistical or sociological report, but a discussion of who we profess to be, what the theological intentions are. The short answer is, “We ought to be what we intended to be and want to be—New Testament Christians, not more and not less, and not necessarily what we are.” But I was not invited here for the short answer. I disappoint those who, like the ancient Athenians, want to hear some new thing. Historians are supposed to live in the past, so indulge me in being reactionary. I still like the Restoration Plea. Hence, I hope to speak words of affirmation and encouragement.

* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Sermon Seminar of Austin Graduate School of Theology on 22 and 23 May 2001.

Those who are pessimistic about Churches of Christ and a program of restorationism are myopic. We need to send them to the mission fields to see what is happening in Africa, India, and South America. But we want it to be only a visit, so they don't stay long enough to infect those churches with their negativism.

Dangers

Nevertheless, there are dangers we face in this country. Those I select are not necessarily the most serious; they are just those about which I could think of something to say.

(1) One danger is *absorption into American Evangelicalism*. There appeared in 1998 a case study of the Mennonite Brethren, who are now the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches. It was written by Calvin Redekop, grandson of one of the co-founders of the Mennonite Brethren in this country, who grew up in that church and then chose to leave it, or rather the church left him, as he remained with a church that continued to honor the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. Redekop contends that the Mennonite Brethren absorbed so much of the American religious culture that they eventually rejected many aspects of their heritage and moved into the amorphous world of Evangelicalism. Practices such as non-resistance, strong identity with a historical heritage within a local congregational context, church discipline, and cultural non-conformity were replaced with a primary emphasis on an individual conversion experience. It was in many ways a shallower theology that de-emphasized a church-centered perspective in favor an individual spirituality and a closer identity with American revivalism.¹

We are large enough that what happened to this small group (about 4,000) is not likely to happen to us, but this is a sober warning. I am not sure

¹ See the review of Calvin W. Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism* (Telford: Pandora, 1998), by Wes Harrison in *Fides et Historia* 32.2 (2000), 170–171.

in practical terms what the Springfield Presbytery meant in 1804 when they willed “that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large,” but I doubt that Evangelicalism is the equivalent of the “body of Christ at large,” and I question that blending into general Evangelicalism is a worthy goal.

(2) Related to this is *the fear of legalism*. Some consider legalism our greatest danger. Let me warn also against an extreme reaction to legalism. Some are so afraid of legalism they are afraid of obedience and of talk about the will of God. They do not recognize that some of us do what we do because we want to please and honor God and not out of guilt or rule-keeping. There is not a legalist under every rock.

I certainly recognize that there are “weightier matters of the law.” But remember all of what Jesus said in Matt 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced *without neglecting the others*.”

(3) Another challenge is coming from *a hermeneutics that seeks to explain away uncomfortable texts*. Those of us in biblical and historical studies, when we do not have another source or some outside control to help interpret a text, use a circular methodology. We use clues in a given text in order to reconstruct the situation that the text addresses; then we use the reconstructed situation in interpreting the text. This approach is often the only way we can proceed, and it may produce useful results. However, we need to recognize the limitations of the method. The result is a reconstruction that may or may not be correct. An interpretation that is based on a hypothetical reconstruction cannot be the basis of an assured application of the resulting interpretation to the present. Two errors are made, even if the reconstruction is true: Making the reconstruction of the situation the key to the application of the text; and taking the next step (really a 100 meter dash) and limiting

the teaching to the reconstructed situation. Nearly all the Bible is addressed to specific occasions. Denying that what was addressed to a particular situation can have a universal application will leave us with an irrelevant Bible.

You have heard it said, “Don’t let the text get in the way of a good sermon.” Turn that around: “Don’t let a good sermon get in the way of the text.” A passage cannot mean now what it did not mean when it was written and did not mean for 2,000 years of Christian history.

(4) Related to this hermeneutical danger is *turning decisions over to the experts—scholars and preachers*. This attitude says that if the university professor or preacher says it, it must be true. “Some things are too important to leave to the experts”—like raising children and shepherding the church. There was a time when we faced considerable anti-scholarly sentiment, and in some circles that is still the case; but there is an opposite danger now of too much reliance on scholarship. I do not intend these remarks to be anti-scholars; we need more of them. The problem for the most part is not with our scholars but with our attitude toward them.

A superficial acquaintance with scholarship gives it a great influence. We need to know the issues more deeply before we can transcend the problems. I read a text and on the surface see no problem. I read what others have studied and begin to see difficulties. I go deeper and either find the answers or see the problems in a better perspective.

We should paraphrase 1 John 4:1, “Test the scholars.” With less serious Bible study in our churches, we depend on what others tell us. We need more people who can do their own study in the texts and not simply know what others have said about them. Instead of listening only to the conclusions of our leaders, we need to examine how and especially why they get to these conclusions. In passing I note the phrase “priesthood of all believers” does not mean the right of the individual to study and interpret

the Bible for himself or herself. Nevertheless, we all do have an obligation to study scripture for ourselves.

(5) Another danger is *identifying the Restoration principle with Lockean philosophy and Common Sense Realism*. The Restoration principle is not dependent on this, and rejection of this philosophy does not entail rejection of restorationism. An Anglican friend in Oxford, when I defined the Churches of Christ in terms of a restoration of New Testament Christianity, insisted that this is not distinctive. Every group, she insisted, claims Biblical authority. True enough, but some more seriously than others. Moreover, there have been conscious Restoration movements through Christian history. The principle is found even in the New Testament: 1 John appeals to what was “at the beginning” as the standard of Christian teaching and practice.

Our way of teaching and arguing has been very much shaped by a particular philosophy. We may have to change our apologetics and rhetoric, but not the principle itself. With every change in philosophy in Christian history there has been a reformulation of the way the Christian faith was expressed in the changed philosophical framework. The difficulty has been keeping this from affecting the heart of Christianity.

(6) A further danger is *giving up on the non-denominational ideal*. Whatever the practical realities are, we should think and act in terms of being non-denominational.

Contributions and Viability

I have talked about dangers, as I see them, but I said that I want to be positive and encouraging. There will be more of that below, but let me include now a positive statement about contributions of the Restoration Movement. I recently completed the entry on “Church” for the Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, being edited by Doug Foster, Paul Blowers, and Newell Williams. Here is my conclusion to that entry:

Despite their divisions, ecclesiology remains an area in which the Stone-Campbell churches have something not only distinctive but also constructive to offer to the larger Christian world. These contributions to ecclesiology include the following points, adhered to with varying degrees of emphasis by all the branches: (1) A strong or “high” doctrine of the importance of the church, balancing the movement’s emphasis on individual liberty. (2) The emphasis on a visible unity of the church and the local congregation as the center of the Christian life. (3) The clarification of the relation of salvation to church membership—what saves also makes one a member of the church. (4) The approach of uniting on what nearly every Christian agrees is right and proper instead of maintaining division over what may be contended for as acceptable but may not be generally accepted.

A scholar friend of mine observed after his doctoral studies in New Testament at a major European university that the arguments given for the position of Churches of Christ often were bad, but the position itself is solid and stood up to thorough, critical New Testament study.

I know for myself that I study the early church with complete confidence. In my study I examine other theological and denominational options. Our problems in Churches of Christ mostly come from human problems, which others also have, and from our misunderstandings of our position. The theological program itself is the key consideration. I have been pleasantly surprised at the acceptance of my historical work across the religious spectrum—Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, historically minded Evangelicals, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren. That acceptance is in part due to the fact that the historical evidence is largely consistent with our ecclesiastical position.

Those who express astonishment at the considerable number of scholars with a trans-denominational stature and international reputation who not only come from Churches of Christ but are active members reveal more about themselves than about us.

I have four prayers for our churches: a deeper spirituality, unity, an evangelistic and missionary spirit, and faithfulness to the word of God. I am

grateful for the contributions the Sermon Seminar of the Austin Graduate School of Theology makes toward the answering of these prayers.

Validity of the Restoration Plea

We have presented some dangers confronting Churches of Christ. But mainly I want to speak an encouraging word. My hope is that, whatever the tensions, a large and broad center is holding. It would be unfortunate if that center accepts a denominational perspective. Even if there is not a center that holds firm, it is important how we respond to problems: with faithfulness, Bible study, prayer, love, and diligence in our ministries. The important thing is what is in our hearts, how we deal with circumstances.

In August, 1973, I published in *Mission* journal an article on "The Validity of the Restoration Plea." I identified the emphases of the Restoration Plea as: to be the New Testament church today; to practice the undenominational unity of the church; and to restore humanity to the image of God.

I offered the following arguments for the validity of Restorationism.

(1) It is *reasonable* to let what was taught at the beginning of Christianity be the standard for what Christianity is. Rationality is out of favor today, and reason has its limitations; but it is preferable to its alternatives.

(2) It has a *theological* basis in Christianity as a revealed, prophetic religion.

(3) It has a *historical* justification as a recurring emphasis in Christian history.

(4) It corresponds to *contemporary* interest in the Bible, and that interest is still present.

(5) It is *practical*. Individuals and groups have come to similar conclusions as ours simply from studying their Bibles. One needs a lot of help to become a Roman Catholic, a Lutheran, a Presbyterian, and so forth; but it doesn't take much outside help to become a New Testament Christian.

Some of us have known individuals who from their reading of the New Testament arrived at a basically similar position to ours and identified themselves with our churches, and our lives have been spiritually blessed from association with those people.

(6) It occupies *ecumenical* ground. It stands for what I might call “common Christianity,” as uncommon as that might be. Our distinctives are for the most part not distinctive. They are mostly items everyone agrees are all right; others only say that something else is all right too.

Strengths

Part of a faithful response in these times is to emphasize our strengths. Oddly enough, some of these strengths are the very things under attack. Let us comment on some of these strengths.

(1) Dedication to the authority of the *Bible* and its careful study by all Christians. This is why a decline in Bible study and Bible knowledge by many members is such a danger. And this is why I say don’t turn the Bible over to the experts.

The slogans “No creed by Christ” and “No book but the Bible” have the limitations of any slogan, but they give us the potential for self-correction. Some of the unrest in our churches now is precisely this process of self-correction at work. Not all is due to that; there are legitimate dangers and concerns that I mentioned in Part I. But some of the changes in attitudes and approach are healthy. Let’s be sure the changes are coming from the Bible and the desire to be faithful to it.

(2) A high doctrine of the *church*. We have correctly stressed the importance of the church in the divine plan of salvation and its necessity for the development of individuals in spiritual growth. The proper doctrine of the church is a necessary corrective to the individualism of current Western society and religion.

Here I would caution against expressing this high doctrine of the church in the language of “incarnation.” If we take the image seriously, it implies too low a view of Christ or too high a view of the church. Jesus was fully human, but “without sin.” There is a high view of the church in Ephesians, but Christ is still “head” of the church.

(3) Centrality of *baptism*. Our position on baptism is now widely recognized as the correct understanding of the New Testament teaching and the practice of the early church. The new liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church gives preference to adult immersion. Some Anglican and Methodist churches are making provision for adult baptisteries in their buildings. We may not be able to take credit for convincing people on this subject, but that does not matter. There is an old Jesuit saying “A lot of good can be done in this world if one is not too careful about who gets the credit for it.” Biblical, historical, and archaeological studies have confirmed our insights on baptism.

(4) The *Lord's supper* as the center of corporate assemblies. Theological interpretations of the Lord's supper still differ widely in the Christian world, but not as much as in the past. But in terms of practice, weekly communion is widely recognized as the norm for Christian worship.

For this reason, my wife and I were dismayed when we visited a church of Christ that had removed its communion table from the front of the assembly hall to the foyer and served from the foyer. The apparent reason was to open up the whole platform area for an uninterrupted view of how much the praise team felt the meaning of the words they sang.

Taking the focus off the word and the supper will be disastrous for us theologically as well as liturgically.

(5) That leads me to another strength: *a cappella music*. Including this as a strength may surprise you, because it seems many consider it a weakness or at least something dispensable. Even people outside our fellowship tell us not to give up on this practice. And I don't know how

many times I hear reports of the delightful amazement of visitors at our meetings when they first hear well-done unaccompanied singing by a whole congregation.

My friend and former student Jeff Childers writes about ACU students in their year-abroad class in Oxford hearing the Greek Orthodox bishop Kallistos (Ware) explain the eastern orthodox practice of unaccompanied singing and their reasons for it. The bishop made these points: This was the way the first Christians sang; it is connected with the doctrine of creation—the human being is the ideal worship instrument; it expresses unity; and it focuses attention on God in worship without mechanical distraction. I am mainly known for my work on the historical argument for *a cappella* music, but I have been giving more attention lately to such theological reasons that provided the basis for the historical practice.

(6) The cultivation of *personal holiness*. Again, a strength is under attack. I will mention two areas. The assault on marriage in our culture and the ravages of divorce have affected Christians.

The culture of war and violence has desensitized us. We need to pay more attention to our calling as peacemakers. We don't talk about this much nor teach our members how to give peace a priority in their lives.

Place of Patterns

Pat Harrell, a formative figure in the Bible Chair at the University of Texas that has become the *Institute for Christian Studies* and now the *Austin Graduate School of Theology* had a unique way of making his points. I would like to quote from one of his bulletin articles when he was preaching in Houston.

Once upon a time there was a tailor—a very fine tailor—who specialized in making shirts.

His craftsmanship was superb. The cloth employed was of the finest quality. The sewing was exceptional, the buttonholes were precise, in short, each shirt was a work of art.

The only difficulty was that the tailor insisted on making each shirt with three

sleeves. Admittedly, in this he was rather arbitrary. But he felt the two sleeve model was too old fashioned and lacking in aesthetic values.

This peculiarity was interpreted differently by prospective customers. Many thought it only a minor flaw, stressing the fine craftsmanship. Others were willing to ignore it because of the reasonable price for which they were sold. Only a few, while admiring the quality, insisted the shirts were valueless because the tailor's pattern was wrong.

While this may be an unlikely story as far as tailors are concerned, it is fairly common in religion.

Many people in "shopping" for a church fail to realize that the most basic requirement—the essential factor that takes precedence over all other considerations—is the pattern or total system.

It is easy enough to find good qualities in all churches. One may excel in dedication, another in good works, still another in devotion, but these commendable characteristics only increase the ultimate frustration if the system is wrong.

The church was designed by Jesus and patterned to fit the nature of humanity. While the style may vary from time to time, there is no need to change the pattern until human nature changes.

Patternism is out of favor, and certainly the idea can be abused and made to say too much. However, the principle of having a pattern is not a bad idea.

Our Response

What should we be doing in the present situation? Groups grow because of the commitment and sacrifice of their members. Most of the suggestions about how to increase our numbers are cosmetic changes, and some not all that tasteful. We need to go deeper.

And we need to concentrate on basics. An Anglican bishop in Canada had a wonderful insight. The Native American nations in Canada were allowed by the Canadian high court to proceed with a class action suit against the four major Christian denominations in that country "for a century of cultural abuse." Even if the plaintiffs lost, the defendants would be completely bankrupted by legal defense costs. There was an interview with

a senior bishop of the Church of England in which the journalist tried to get him to panic, or at least to say something inflammatory about his church's plight. He coolly observed that "the church of Christ can do everything it has to do with a Book, a table, a bottle of wine, and a loaf of bread; all the rest is not really necessary." We might want to add a pool of water to the bishop's list, but the point is that we should focus on the fundamentals.

No matter how dismal the situation becomes, we don't need much to be faithful and to do our work. Nice buildings are just that—nice. Strong institutions are useful, but they can lose their usefulness.

We can decide the direction we want to go. But we do not know what the Spirit of God will do. There is a wonderful line in the movie "Rudy," about a young man without great physical attributes but an overwhelming desire to play football for Notre Dame. As he visits with a Roman Catholic priest, the priest says, "I have been engaged in religious studies for thirty-eight years, and I have learned only two truths. The first is, There is a God; and the second is, I am not he."

I have tried to reaffirm some basic principles and bring a hopeful word. You may accuse me of whistling in the dark. I don't think the situation is as dark as some do. Even if it is, I had rather whistle than tremble. One of the things I remember about my father is that he whistled a lot, and he whistled joyfully. He lived through hard times, and he didn't mind telling others about it. But mostly, I remember that he whistled.

Identity and Vocation

Commencement Speech for ICS Graduates, Sunday, May 20, 2001

Paul Watson

Tom Selleck, the actor known to some of us as Monica's "significant other" on *Friends* and to the rest of us as Magnum, P.I., has been in Durham for the past few weeks rehearsing at Duke for the Broadway revival of *A Thousand Clowns*. In an interview that appeared in our local newspaper last Sunday, Selleck talked about having spent what little free time he had with students in drama classes, answering their questions and talking about the acting profession. When asked his impressions of the students, Selleck volunteered, "At this age they're consumed with *what* they want to be. I tried to tell them it's important *who* they want to be."¹

Not a bad point, is it? I expect that you have already been asked, repeatedly perhaps, "Well, what are you going to do now? Go on to graduate study? Take a ministry with a church? Something else?" I won't ask you that. I will ask, "*Who* are you, now—and who will you be in the days to come?"

¹ Adrienne M. Johnson, "Class Clowns," *Raleigh (North Carolina) News and Observer*, 13 May 2001, sec. G, p. 1.

Let me suggest that, not only for you graduates but for all of us as Christians, the best answer is threefold. Our individual responses might differ in their particulars, but I trust that we would collectively affirm three complementary, interlocking aspects of our identity as Christians, the first of which is that we are children of God. By God's grace, and out of his overwhelming love for us, he has adopted us into his family.

I had known about the human adoption process for some time, but I experienced it firsthand only about eight weeks ago when our son and daughter-in-law in Dallas adopted an infant son. They had applied long ago, but the call to "come and get your baby" came suddenly, unexpectedly. It just so happened that I was in town and so was able to go with them, along with my sister and brother-in-law, their son and his fiancée, and another couple from their church. What a party we had, there at the hospital! What joy, what hope, what love flowed among us and all around "Baby Luke," as he is now known. Now I can so much better imagine the joy in heaven over our adoption into God's family, and so much more deeply appreciate the peace, the security, that comes from my having been adopted, like "Baby Luke," into a loving family—a family whose father is God and whose older brother is Jesus Christ.

"What difference does this make for my future ministry?" you might be thinking. All the difference in the world, so long as you remember, each day, *who* you are. Your prioritizing of tasks, your anxiety over the "success" of one church program or another, your relationships with others, especially with family members—all will be affected, deeply, by your constant recollection of your relationship with God. Your studying will depend, not on assignments and deadlines, but on your hunger and thirst to know your Father's will. Prayer will be, not a luxury, but a necessity; not a duty, but a delight.

The difference will be felt especially in times of stress and strain; of doubt, opposition, and temptation. In the face of such challenges, Martin Luther would remind himself, “But I have been baptized! I have been baptized.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his German prison cell, felt conflicted about his identity. Was he the “good Christian”—the calm, cheerful, friendly person he appeared to be to others? Or was he the restless, weary, empty person he felt himself to be? He said,

Who am I? This or the other?
 Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
 Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
 And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
 Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

His answer was,

Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!²

The second part of our answer to the question, “Who am I?” is that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The old custom of addressing fellow Christians as “Brother Smith” or “Sister Jones”—a custom that I grew up with—implicitly gave witness to the truth that, as Christians, we inevitably live together, in community. My favorite New Testament attestation of that reality—one that combines our adoption by God with our fellowship with one another—is Gal 3:26–28:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.³

This communal dimension of my identity may seem to you to be self-evident, but let me caution you that such is not the case with everyone.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1953), 173.

³ Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

Our culture remains captivated by the notion of the autonomous, all-sufficient “Self.” As Kenneth Woodward writes in the latest issue of *Newsweek*, speaking of the existentialist movement of the mid-twentieth century, “The self became the only interesting place to be: ‘Hell,’ Jean-Paul Sartre observed, ‘is other people.’”⁴ And today it is common to hear a person, in explaining his or her non-affiliation with any religious group, say, “I’m spiritual; I’m just not very religious.”

Such a notion, for all its sincerity, is absolutely unbiblical. Nowhere in scripture does God invite his people to live in some sort of splendid isolation. God had Moses lead the people of Israel to Sinai precisely so that God could begin shaping them into a covenant community. Even Elijah, who had quite understandably fled to Horeb for safety and solitude, was sent by God back to his people to continue his ministry among them. The peripatetic apostle Paul regularly departed from, and returned to, the church in Antioch, of which he obviously considered himself a member. Our Lord himself, his singular identity with God notwithstanding, gathered a community around him and not only loved and shaped those disciples but asked for their support as well: “‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch’” (Mark 14:34).

I say all of this to remind you that your ministry, whatever form it may take, will be done among and with and through your brothers and sisters in Christ. That will not always be pleasant or easy, of course:

To live and love with the saints above—Oh, that will be glory!
But to live below with the saints we know—now that’s another story!

But it is unavoidable and, ultimately, it will enrich and sustain you. For you have not come to this commencement day alone. Your family, your home

⁴ Kenneth L. Woodward, “Overcoming Sin,” *Newsweek*, 21 May 2001, 37.

congregation, this academic community, the people with whom you worship and serve God now—all are in a real way a part of who you are. It cannot be otherwise; you should not wish it otherwise. For these imperfect, neglectful, demanding fellow Christians can also be God’s ministering angels to you—as our youth minister, Lee, and his wife, Jean, discovered over the past ten days. They were expecting their first child in June. Friday a week ago, at her regular checkup, Jean was told, “The baby’s heart has stopped beating. He is dead.” None of us could change that hideous reality or adequately assuage their terrible pain. But we could and did reach out to them with calls, cards, food, tears, and prayers. Last Wednesday evening, after the memorial service, Lee gave me a great hug and said, “I just can’t tell you what being a part of this church family means to us right now.”

The third dimension of our identity, I would propose to you, is that of servants—servants of God, of one another, of all the world. It is our vocation, literally—our calling. Jesus’ invitation to Peter and Andrew, to James and John, was not simply to *be* or to *experience* but to *do*: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Later, when James and John had placed themselves at the head of the line, so to speak, and the other ten had taken understandable offense, Jesus made it clear to them, and to us, what his calling entailed:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42–45)

You may already know what specific form of ministry your calling will take, or you may not. Whatever the form, its substance must remain the same—that of service. Now in rendering that service you will, in my experience, face two great challenges, both of which are addressed by the apostle Paul in the early chapters of 2 Corinthians. The first great challenge

is that of despair, when our service is not productive or appreciated, when its results are not lasting. As Fred Craddock has reminded us, there are two kinds of preaching to which people will not listen—bad preaching and good preaching. To this danger of despair, Paul responds:

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:1, 8, 9)

The other great challenge to our service is self-glorification—taking personal credit for and pride in whatever good God may accomplish through us. To this danger Paul replies:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Cor 4:5, 7)

In his recent book *Calling and Character*, Will Willimon cites the example of John Chrysostom—"John the Golden Mouth"—one of the most noted preachers of the early church.

At the conclusion of one his sermons in Constantinople, when the congregation broke into enthusiastic applause, Chrysostom turned on the congregation and mocked them for applauding what they had no intention of taking to heart, derided them as scoundrels unworthy of the gospel, and announced that all applause would hereafter be forbidden in this church. This announcement brought down the house with applause.⁵

Nevertheless, with all its inherent challenges, our service to God, to his people, and to his world must become our identity. Service is not just what we *do*; servants is who we *are*. There can be no greater fulfillment than to be entrusted with such service, and to know that "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). There will be no greater joy than to hear the

⁵ William Willimon, *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 14.

Master say one day, "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt 25:21).

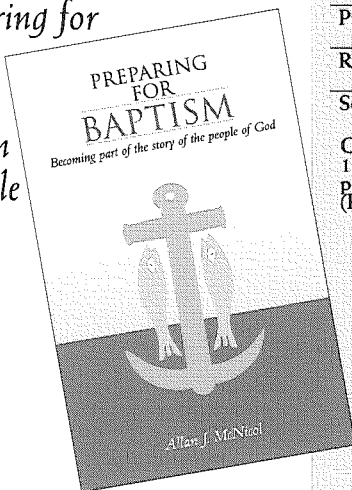
Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?
Children of God.
Brothers and sisters to all of God's children.
Servants of Jesus Christ.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

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Jeffrey Peterson

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:1–4)

They tell us that we're living in an age of information. They tell us that we have available to us, each in our own living room, more pieces of information—more bits, they call them—than any people ever in the history of the world. With the push of a button, with the flick of a switch, we can instantly call up words and pictures from any point on the globe. From the comfort of your easy chair you can look up books in the libraries of great universities; you can turn on the TV and catch the evening news from Russia via satellite. You can hear prices quoted off the Tokyo stock exchange on the hourly business update as you drive around town, or sit in traffic, or you can follow the progress of a war as it happens on CNN. So, they tell us,

*A sermon preached at Sunset Ridge Church of Christ, 4 June 2000.

we're lucky to be living in an age of so many digital possibilities; they usually tell us this as they're getting ready to sell us the next piece of equipment they say we need.

But there are a few things they don't say. They don't tell us that all that information we command needs to be sorted out if it's going to mean anything to us. Erasmus is said to be the last person who had mastered the whole range of human understanding, in the sixteenth century. Well, maybe Erasmus could make sense of all the information that we're bombarded with, but that leaves the rest of us at a bit of a loss.

Another thing they don't point out: a troubling amount of the "information" we can find on the Internet or on cable is perverted and destructive and dehumanizing. And it's even less advertised that the vast majority of what the information age makes instantly available to us is utterly trivial and a waste of the time that God has granted us. They don't tell us that all that *information* we have such ready access to may have precious little to do with the *truth*—the truth of who we are, and what we ought to be doing, and how God made us to be.

So at the end of the day, when we're left to ourselves for a few moments, when we shut down the computer and turn off the TV and try to collect ourselves for a few minutes of evening prayer, with the images still swirling around in our imaginations and the words of broadcasters and advertisers echoing in our ears, in those moments we're left to wonder: in all of this chatter that we're constantly exposed to, what really matters?

That's where the word of God meets us in the text of Scripture today. The text is taken from the book of Romans. If Paul had wanted to give Romans a subtitle, he might have called it "things that matter," because it's in this letter that Paul leaves us his fullest account of the Gospel that he preached all over the world, the Gospel that he says as the letter opens is the very power of God to save all who are lost, to heal all of us who aren't well,

and to make us that are broken whole—and there's nothing anywhere that matters more than that. In Rom 8:1–4, Paul directs our attention to three truths that can anchor our lives no matter what's next to come down the information superhighway. And so we are invited to consider these three things that matter.

The first is the law of our Creator. The law of God is an important topic in Romans; it's mentioned frequently in the chapters leading up to chapter 8, and three times right in our passage. Now when Paul or any biblical writer talks about the law of God, we have to watch out that we don't misunderstand what's being said. Because it's a very special kind of law that they're talking about.

Most often when we think of law, we think of the law of the land, the sort of law that governs us when we drive on the highway: the law that sets the speed limit at 70 miles per hour, for example. Now we know that the law imposes speed limits to protect us and other drivers, and so we don't protest about it—not too much, anyway.

But from one point of view the law is arbitrary. Why 70 miles an hour? Why not 75? Why not 60? The speed limit doesn't have to be set where it is. It doesn't absolutely have to be there at all. We hear about highways in exotic places like Germany and (until recently) Montana that make do with no speed limit whatsoever. And even if we don't want to drive on highways like that ourselves, even if we agree that it's best for the law to limit our speed, still we can see how that kind of law is always a bit arbitrary.

There's a penalty to be paid for violating the speed limit, but the penalty is arbitrary, too; it's decided by legislatures which occasionally revisit it and adjust it up or down. What's more, we only pay the penalty if we get caught. And it's not only the speed limit that works this way: all the statutes that legislatures pass and policemen enforce and judges apply are

written down in public record, and they seem solid enough when we find ourselves up against them. Nonetheless, they're changeable; they don't have to be the way they are.

But there's another kind of law that governs us on the highway, a different kind of law. My family and I get around in a minivan equipped with a manual transmission, and every time I shift the gears, I engage a little device called a clutch. And there are no exceptions to this when you're driving our Voyager. You could say it's a law that when gears are shifted in our minivan, the clutch will be engaged. This law is even written down in a book, like the speed limit law; it's right there in the owner's manual.

Now when we're driving a five-speed, why is it that we obey the law of the clutch? Is it because we're afraid that if we don't we'll be pulled over and ticketed by the clutch police? How much sense would it make to launch a campaign to repeal the law of the clutch? What good would it do for a politician to declare, "The drivers of manual transmissions should be freed from this oppressive law; it's our duty as citizens to organize and overturn it"? No, if you're thinking that way, you don't understand the kind of law we're talking about. Because this is the law of the way the car is made.

And that's the kind of law God's law is. It's the law of the way *we* are made. You see, we have a creator, too, just as surely as Voyagers are made by Plymouth. Our creator made us to run in a certain way, just like Chrysler. His law is the way he made us to run. Now for our guidance God saw to it that his law was written down—in the law of Moses and the prophets of Israel and the writings of the Apostles. And you can look at the Bible and if you like you can say, "That's arbitrary; those are just words written in a book. There's nothing requiring us to live the way the Bible teaches; and if we choose not to, there's no penalty, at least none we can see." You can treat the owner's manual of your car the same way. You can

refuse to engage the clutch or change the oil. And it may run okay for a while; but sooner or later it's going to fail, and so will we if we disregard the will of the one who made us.

So that's the law that Paul's referring to in Romans chapter 8, the will of God expressed in Scripture but also experienced by each of us in our own lives. And there's nothing that matters more to any of us than discerning the will of God and conforming our lives to it. But that's where we find ourselves in a bind: we can't fully keep the law of God; we don't fully conform our lives to his will. Left to ourselves, we break his law again and again. The written record of God's will isn't powerful enough to overcome our sinfulness. And that brings Paul to the second of his things that matter, the sending of God's son into the world, the incarnation of Christ. In Christ, Paul tells us, God has done what the law could not do. His Son came in the likeness of our sinful flesh and in the death and resurrection of Christ God executed his judgment on sin itself.

We can learn from the Old Testament most of what we need to know about God's law and God's will, but it's the coming of Christ into the world that marks something new and extraordinary and life-changing in the Christian gospel that Paul preached. The sending of God's Son into the world means that the law of God is no longer just a theory. The will of God isn't just a nice idea for a life, a wonderful goal recorded for posterity in the Old Testament. Christ has come as the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs and he's lived the life of perfect obedience that the Law and the Prophets call for.

And there's more; Paul spells his point out in Gal 4:4–6, where he speaks of two sendings, two missions that God has undertaken in the Christian era. First, God sent his Son to live and die and live again; then, he sent the Spirit of his risen Son into our hearts when we were baptized, and it's in that Spirit that we're able to call on God as our Father through Jesus Christ.

Because Christ has come into the world and lived a life like the one we're living and died a death as each of us will die, and because his Spirit has been poured out in our hearts, his life of perfect obedience to God's will has become a possibility for us, too. As Rom 8:4 says, "the just requirement of the law" can be fulfilled among us Christians who don't take our cues from the flesh, but from the Spirit of Christ that lives among us and within us. The good news of the gospel is that because of Christ we can become the people God would have us be—not all at once, not overnight, not ever finally in this life, but slowly and surely, as surely as Christ Jesus died to make us his.

And that's the third thing that matters: the way of life that Christ's death teaches and that the Spirit makes possible among us, the love of neighbor. Now love of neighbor isn't mentioned in our passage in so many words, but as we've just seen in v. 4 Paul refers to "the just requirement of the law"; and when Paul comes to explain what "the just requirement of the law" is in Rom 13:8, he says that it is summed up in one commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That is the commandment that is fulfilled in Christ's death. When we were his enemies, when we were sinners too weak to obey God's law ourselves, Christ died to benefit us; and God's law teaches us to give our lives to helping our neighbor, too.

The striking thing about this command is its universality. A scribe once asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" And Jesus answered, "Anyone you can imagine that you're in a position to help." That's what the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches. Your neighbor is the person sitting next to you on the pew; the husband or wife who faces you across the breakfast table; that troublesome, difficult person who occupies the office next to yours. Your neighbor is the beggar on the street whose sign asks you for money to buy food but who plans to spend anything you give him on booze,

and the unborn child whom your cousin or co-worker or daughter is considering not carrying to term.

Christians are naturally concerned for those we love; but we're also concerned for those who are loved by no one. They matter to us, because they matter to the God who created them. And we're summoned to extend to them the kind of sacrificial love that we see most clearly on an old rugged cross.

Paul begins this discussion of three things that matter with a declaration: for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation under the law of God. If we've been made members of Christ in baptism, if week to week we're receiving the food that strengthens us at his table, if every day we're turning to him in prayer and being drawn by his Spirit deeper and deeper into his resurrected life, then we can rest secure that God will finally declare us innocent of all violations against his law; that's why Christ came. That's the gift he died to give us.

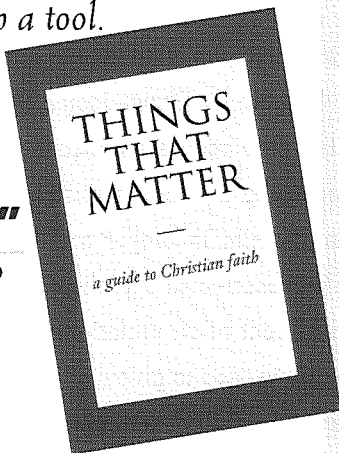
God's gift of new life in Christ is, as they sometimes say on TV, an offer not available in stores. But it is available wherever two or three are gathered in his name, because (he has promised) that is where he can be found; and so it is available here, today, as we stand to sing.

" Simple, yet Substantive.

I have often wished for an introductory guide to Christian faith to share with an earnest inquirer or a new Christian. Things That Matter is such a tool.

*It's excellent!
Simple, yet substantive.
I heartily recommend it!"*

Harold Hazelip
Lipscomb University



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Scriptural Teaching on Women:
Occasional Advice or Norm for the Ages?

Carroll Osburn. *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal*, 2nd ed.
Abilene: ACU Press, 2001, Pp. 280.

Reviewed by Allan J. McNicol

The church has always struggled with how to apply Scripture to the contemporary situation. In past centuries Scripture was quoted to justify colonialism and slavery. Today people construe Scripture to underwrite gay rights, which is viewed as the key expression of tolerance in modern Western egalitarian culture.

Often the church finds itself in tension with the culture, since it is governed by norms drawn from its sacred book that emerged in antiquity. In recent years tensions have become apparent between biblical descriptions and modern views of the role of women. With strong egalitarian sentiments present in the culture there is cause to consider whether the customs of Churches of Christ are on the wrong side of history with respect to the roles women play in our faith community.

Carroll Osburn believes we are. The second edition of his book now titled *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal* indulges in some straight talk. He views historic Christianity as being flatly wrong on the question of women in ministry. Osburn argues that egalitarianism (the interchangeability of women and men in all areas of the church and society) was the original

intent of the Creator and is the teaching of Scripture. That particular texts are not always supportive of this view is, in his estimation, due solely to the early church's accommodation to cultural situations. Now that Western Society is gradually breaking out of its hierarchical mold, modern egalitarianism should be allowed to flourish in the church. As applied to life in the church, this means not only women reading Scripture in the assembly but, as culture permits, serving as preachers and elders.

Osburn first traces recent Evangelical discussion on this issue, thus making the book accessible to a wider market audience than Restorationists. (Still, names such as E. G. Sewell and F. LaGard Smith appear.) Through critical assessment one gets the picture of how Osburn views positions traditionally held in the church fitting into the wider conversation of Evangelical theology. In Restorationist fashion Osburn follows with a chapter on hermeneutical methodology. He follows with a number of chapters dealing with key texts. Here he is often in dialogue with contributors in his earlier edited work *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (College Press, 1993 and 1995).

At the outset Osburn states, "What I would really like to see is more gracious, objective, and balanced discussion of the topic of women in the church" (p. 3). In view of this plea the polemical tone of the book is puzzling. Alternative views are frequently subjected to disparaging ridicule almost to the point of caricature. Especially dismissive are his evaluations of "Radical Feminism" and "Patriarchalism."

Two Fundamental Issues

Two connected issues addressed in the book commend themselves for discussion. First, there is the issue of viewing modern egalitarianism as a way of construing the male-female relationship in the created order. Second, there is the related question as to whether the biblical text actually supports and advocates modern egalitarianism.

Throughout the book there is an underlying tone that the attribution of culturally acceptable roles to men and women is problematic. Osburn considers this as simply revisiting the long history of those who utilized power as a tool to oppress and demean women. This is reinforced by a reading of Genesis 1–2 where we are told that God created the human (male and female) in total equality and that the various hierarchies and orders that subsequently developed in human history came as a result of the Fall (cf. Gen 3:16). With the advent of the new Adam people of faith in the new creation should seek the original ideal that the Creator intended: the full equality of humans regardless of gender distinction, i.e., modern egalitarianism.

But important questions may be asked. Is modern egalitarianism a pipe dream? A growing body of sociological evidence indicates that there are inherent characteristics attached to being female and male embedded in the created order. These go far deeper than distortions brought by the Fall. One only needs to look at studies of the *kibbutzim* in modern Israel where, in a planned egalitarian society, women persistently and against their own self-interest gravitated in the direction of maternal roles while men moved to positions of power. This coheres with a reading of Gen 2:18, 24 where the creation of the woman with her own peculiar qualities (roles) and her union with the male is said to complete or complement the Creator's work in fashioning humanity. Both male and female have their own special characteristics. As noted above, what ought to come to light with the New Adam in the new creation is a *restitution* of what the Creator intended for the human in the beginning. Make no mistake, although often distorted, these vital distinctive gender characteristics are embedded in the created order! Biblically speaking, the Fall led to their abuse and distortion. But in the new order after Christ it is our task to recover our divinely appointed roles in keeping with the original intent of the Creator. This is both a more

realistic and a more biblical picture of reality than the fiction of modern egalitarianism.

Osburn chooses to call this alternative to modern egalitarianism “hierarchical complementarianism.” He believes this relegates the woman to an inferior realm both in the church and in society. But this is a confusion. To play a role does not necessarily involve one in a ranking system; subordination does not necessarily entail inferiority. In a ballet the male dancer and the ballerina play vastly different roles, but both are equally critical to the performance. Similarly, men and women complement one another in the different roles they play in various areas in life, including the church. One is not necessarily superior to the other.

Thus we come to the critical issue of the teaching of the early church on this matter. Although Osburn’s treatment of these texts warrants more attention than allowable in a space allotted for a review, several observations may be made.

The New Testament Evidence

First, Osburn rightly notes that in the early church women participated in a range of activities in church life. The examples of Phoebe, Prisca (Priscilla), and Junia, as well as such texts as 1 Cor 11:5 and 16:15, 16 surely establish that point. Yet, even here, some words of caution are appropriate. Osburn makes much of the example of Priscilla instructing Apollos in Acts 18:24–26 (148–153). He regards it as the “crucial text” to warrant Scriptural support for a woman teaching a community in a confessional setting. Yet the critical reference (Acts 18:26) is open to question textually. Some of the French commentators, on the basis of a critical analysis of the *Codex Bezae*, which they consider as close as one may come to the original text of Acts, even omit Priscilla in their critical reconstruction of the Western Text. Since this is an area of Osburn’s own scholarly work, it is surprising that he makes no mention that his key passage is under a cloud textually.

Second, Osburn can be congratulated for not falling into the trap of basing egalitarianism on a reading of Gal 3:26–28. Despite many efforts to the contrary, it is clear that Paul never intended to say that male and female roles were to be obliterated in the communal life of the new creation. Some (viz., a party in the church at Corinth) may have misunderstood him in this way. But it is clear from the way he formulated his “pairs” in such later texts as 1 Cor 7:18, 19; 12:13 and Col 3:11, omitting references to male and female to ensure against misunderstanding, that what Paul meant to say in Galatians 3 was that with respect to entrance into the church, the ground at the foot of the cross was level. Osburn knows this and for that we are glad.

Nevertheless, if one omits Gal 3:26–28, it becomes difficult to discover just where to anchor egalitarianism textually. This is apparent when one comes to such critical texts as 1 Cor 11:2–16, 14:34, 35, and 1 Tim 2:11–15, not to mention all the other New Testament passages that refer to the submission of women. Osburn claims that his analysis of these texts is totally objective. But it appears that he simply *presumes* that Paul endorses women to do about anything in the assembly; and that all that Paul is doing is correcting particular isolated abuses. But even setting aside the hermeneutical question as to how Osburn can know in which situations direct commands of Scripture (1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:11, 12) are to be applied or ignored today, there is a serious question as to whether he has perceived accurately what Paul is doing in these situations. In my judgment, Paul is engaged in a profound theological exercise. He is speaking on male-female issues in the early Christian community on the basis of a reading of Genesis 1–2 in light of the coming of the new creation in Christ. As a Jew steeped in a deep exegetical tradition of the interpretation of Genesis 1–2, Paul finds himself sorting out what it means to live as male and female in the new age of redemption. Over and over again, in many texts in his letters, Paul appeals to a reading of Genesis 1–2 to show the dependence of woman

and man on one another (1 Cor 11:11, 12) and for insight into the appropriate roles of male and female in the new creation (cf. 1 Cor 11:8, 9; 14:34, 35; 1 Tim 2:11–15). This theological approach to the reading of Genesis 1–2 is normative for Paul. This comes out in the freedom for women to do many things in the assembly, but not to be teachers of Christian doctrine or elders. While not endorsing the status quo in the contemporary church, what is critical today is for us to continue the theological task of finding our place in the new creation in light of the true intent of the Creator for male and female as revealed in Genesis 1–2.

We are not there yet. No one is able to find an Archimedean or objective point outside of history with regard to the biblical texts in question. In view of the way Paul read the creation texts, modern egalitarian readings are as “East of Eden” as is male domination and possibly more deceptive. One wonders, what makes a modern cultural framework more valid than the one in which Paul operated? Does modern egalitarianism really reflect a movement toward the kingdom of God?

The question of our life together in the new creation is a matter that demands serious consideration. We can thank Carroll Osburn for having the courage to address this serious topic. It is our wish, however, that these issues be addressed through theological arguments and not by embracing to fashionable trends of contemporary culture.

Years ago, Albert Schweitzer surveyed the Lives of Jesus written in Europe in the nineteenth century. He concluded that the Jesus they “discovered” was like a man looking down a well and seeing his own reflection and that these books on Jesus were largely reflections of the nineteenth-century biases of the authors. Despite his disclaimers, one wonders if Osburn has escaped this same trap in his own arguments that the first century church was egalitarian.

Character Renewal

We say we want a renewal of character in our day but we don't really know what we ask for. To have a renewal of character is to have a renewal of a creedal order that constrains, limits, binds, obligates, and compels. This price is too high for us to pay. We want character but without unyielding convictions; we want strong morality but without the emotional burden of guilt or shame; we want virtue but without particular moral justifications that invariably offend; we want good without having to name evil; we want decency without the authority to insist upon it; we want moral community without any limitations to personal freedom. In short we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it.

James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character*

Church Growth

In our zeal for mass conversion and standard strategies, we overlook the fact that evangelism requires far more than effective methods. The gospel is not a consumer product to be marketed by drawing from a strategic toolkit. . . . I believe it is time to admit that our worship at the altar of success all too often reflects secular preoccupations rather than biblical fidelity.

James Engel, "Getting Beyond the Numbers Game,"

Christianity Today

What, then, ought we to do? If we put that question to the New Testament, we will get an answer that may seem at first blush disappointing, even negative. We should like to find there some suggested course of action, but

there is none. No strategy for world conquest is mapped out; no program of political or social action is even suggested; no ecumenical organization is pushed in order to further the solidarity of Christians in face of danger . . . We come, then, to the New Testament asking what to do, seeking a program of action. And the New Testament answer is: there shall no program be given you—except to be the church!

John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*

Church and Society

[G]od help the church that so blends into society that there is no longer any difference! Such a church will produce no quality of behavior other than that which society in general produces. It will take on the prejudices of society, and even demand that its gospel support those prejudices. It will make itself a tool of society whose main business it is to protect and to dignify with divine support the best interests of its constituents. And that is stark tragedy! The end of it is a poverty-stricken church which utters no Word, states no demands, summons to no destiny—but has a host of activities you would enjoy.

John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*

Emotional Pragmatism

When an individual ceases to grapple intellectually with the problems posed by his religion, feeling takes the place of thought. . . .The individual no longer asks, “What is the truth?” Instead, he asks “What do I feel?” And that is but one step to the next question: “How does this make me feel?” Emotional pragmatism now takes the place of honest confrontation with the Christian message. The way is opened for the attitude of the religious consumer, who shops around the denominational supermarket for just the right combination of spiritual kicks and thrills to meet his particular psychological needs. The question of truth loses all significance.

Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*

Fixation and Dependency in Pastoral Counseling

Recent pastoral counseling has incurred a fixated dependency upon and an indebtedness to modern psychology and modern consciousness generally that has prevented it from even looking at all premodern wisdoms, including classical pastoral care. . . . We have bet all our chips on the assumption that modern consciousness will lead us into vaster freedoms while our specific freedom to be attentive to our own Christian pastoral tradition has been plundered, polemicized, and despoiled.

Thomas Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*

Austin Graduate School of Theology

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Novelty Worship

A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. . . . The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself, and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping.

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*

Practical Atheism

[W]hen modern man undertakes an operation he relies on those means which have long been shown to be effective. He does not rely on the Lord. The results he is after are perfectly obtainable without prayer. This is so with increasing frequency.

Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*

Retrospection on Atheism

[T]here seems to be a widespread assumption . . . that belief in God is based on all kinds of irrational, immature needs and wishes, whereas atheism or skepticism flows from a rational, grown-up, no-nonsense view of things as they really are.

But the major factors involved in my becoming an atheist—though I was not really aware of them at the time—were not intellectual, but social and psychological. I turn to these since they are rarely discussed, even though there is good reason to believe that, at least for many people, social-psychological factors are far more influential than rational arguments.

I desired to be accepted by the powerful and influential scientists in the field of psychology. In particular, I wanted to be accepted by my professors in graduate school. As a graduate student, I was thoroughly socialized by the specific “culture” of academic research psychology. My professors . . . were as far as I could tell, united in two things: their intense career ambitions and their rejection of religion. . . . I learned to think like a proper psychologist by putting on the right—that is atheistic—ideas and attitudes.

Paul Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*

Staging a God Experience

Increasingly you find people talking about the worship *experience* rather than the worship *service*. That reflects what's happening in the outside world. I'm dismayed to see churches abandon the means of grace that God

ordains simply to conform to the patterns of the world.

John Gilmore, "No Experience Necessary," *Leadership*

Theological Students and Football Players

I never understood why theological students preparing for the arduous task of leadership in a local congregation should have more tender personalities than football players.

John Leith, *The Crisis in the Church*

TV Watching

Watching television requires no skills and develops no skills. That is why there is no such thing as remedial television-watching. That is also why you are no better today at watching television than you were five years ago, or ten.

Neil Postman, *Conscientious Objections*

What Makes a Nation? (Church?)

What makes a nation? A large part of the answer to that question is: common historical memories. When a nation's history is poorly taught in schools, ignored by the young, and proudly rejected by qualified elders, awareness of tradition consists only in wanting to destroy it.

Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence*

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