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GOD'S MISSION HAS A CHURCH

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Editorial

GOD'S MISSION HAS A CHURCH

When I arrived as a B. D. student at Union Theological Seminary in the autumn of 1966, the giants who had made Union luminous in the fifties had departed the scene. Reinhold Niebuhr was still there in emeritus capacity and suffering from the effects of a stroke. But Tillich had moved on to Harvard, John Macquarrie was taking his existentialist theology to Oxford and James Muilenburg no longer brought his galvanizing eloquence to the Old Testament classroom. Still, there were stimulating faculty members to interest and even inspire us. One of them was Johannes Hoekendijk, newly appointed professor of mission.

We had heard the stories of how the S.S. had detained and tortured Hoekendijk as a member of the Dutch underground. So, when we heard that he would address a fireside gathering one Sunday evening in Advent, many of us turned up in anticipation. Surprisingly, given that it was at liberal Union, he spoke on the importance of the second advent of Christ for Christian hope. What made it all the more surprising was the fact that Hoekendijk appeared to be something of a revolutionary, upsetting the theological order of the day with his insistence on the priority of mission for theology and church.

His seminal book, *The Church Inside Out*, described the church and its ministries as “a function of the apostolate,” that is, as essentially an instrument of mission. It had no other dignity than that assigned to it by God. “. . . The church is set in this world with the sole purpose of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth.” And this could not mean attempting to rebuild Christendom with its protective and comforting walls. The goal of evangelism was not the growth of the church or its influence, but the service of a messianic *shalom* affecting all of life.

Half a century on, it is clear that Hoekendijk and others were leading the way to a new self-understanding of the church as an instrument of God's mission and to new emphasis on the place of mission in the theological curriculum. The trend had begun earlier when Karl Barth, in a 1932 lecture, re-introduced the idea of “the mission of God” after centuries of obscurity. The Latin *missio* means “sending” and the mission of the triune God described by Barth is the sending into the world of the Son by the Father, and of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. Two

decades later, at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council, the concept of the divine mission was extended to include God's sending of the church into the world.

Two further decades on, some authors began to propose that mission is in fact an attribute of God; God is by nature a missionary God. Now it is commonplace to speak of the *missio dei*, the mission of God to the world which it is the church's privilege to serve. The shift entailed in the new understanding of the *missio dei* can be described as a move from church-centred missions to a mission-centred church. "There is a church because there is a mission, not vice versa" (A.M. Aagaard). In the heyday of Protestant missions it was usual to think of missions in the plural, and as falling under the aegis of the churches or of mission agencies. The key departure in the missiological transformation was the realization that mission is first of all God's and consequently a singular.

With the focus shifted to God's own mission to the world, it became clear that the world could no longer be regarded as standing outside the intention or reach of God's care or purposes. The missiological transformation also came to include a shift in understanding the relationship among church, world and kingdom. In the former paradigm, there was an almost complete identification of the church with the kingdom, or reign, of God, so that the world was an alien place to be conquered for faith. What could be experienced of the reality of the kingdom was contained within the life of church, and the coming of the kingdom in its fullness would be the inclusion of all the saved within its communion. This was clearly true of the Roman Catholic Church before Vatican II, but there was a parallel among Protestants also. To illustrate: some readers may recall the Mission and Maintenance side of the old United Church duplex offering envelope, its invitation printed in red ink—"For the Extension of God's Kingdom." It was easily assumed that the growth of the church was identical with the growth of the kingdom. The church was too readily seen as the main, and even the only, sphere of divine action in the world.

Now, in both Catholic and Protestant theology, the church is regularly understood to be "sign and instrument" of God's kingdom, but not identical with it. The kingdom is God's project from beginning to end, and is the ultimate goal of creation. Its character springs directly from the

will of God, and the church can neither contain nor control it. All well and good. But sometimes missional rhetoric gets out of hand and it appears that the church may be dispensable in the purposes of God. The empirical church certainly can be ineffectual and disappointing enough to tempt one to draw such a conclusion. The church's complicity in exploitive colonial relationships, the cover-ups of abuse by clergy and the debilitating impact of congregational conflict all have their effect on church members as well as on a secularist citizenry. There has been a loss in spiritual and moral standing that affects how people generally, and even theologians, regard the church.

Yet most of us also have seen the church and its people in moments that reflect the glory of God. Moreover, Scripture attests that God has willed to use the frail and frequently failing vessel that is the church. The treasure is in earthen vessels to be sure. But underline this truth: the church *is carrying a treasure*. In proclaiming the gospel from generation to generation, and in encouraging its members to live the gospel, the church becomes more fully what it already is—sign and instrument of God's kingdom.

In liberal churches like the United Church, the concept of a divine mission for the sake of the world has come to predominate not only in its policies on mission but also in its institutional rhetoric and overall theological orientation. However, it sometimes appears that we have not carried forward other aspects of the missiological shift that would connect us more deeply with the biblical witness to the sending God. Sometimes a "theology of life" is advanced without much reference to the triune God and the sending into the world of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This leads to the impression of shallowness in some accounts of "God's mission," the direct result of an absent depth dimension, that of christological faith.

In this number on ecclesiology, our authors serve up a rich offering. Ed Searcy lifts up the nature of the church as primarily a gift from God and sets forth five authenticating marks of a living church. Wendy Fletcher corrects the record on Bonhoeffer's understanding of "religionless Christianity," and shows how church and Jesus Christ remained vital to it. Drawing on a crucial World Council of Churches'

report and expounding a vital passage from the Gospel of Luke, Aaron Miller provides a biblical understanding of the nature of the church as created and enlivened by the triune God, and as called to attest God's great work in Jesus Christ. Addressing the challenges of the church's institutional life, Doug Goodwin reports on the United Church obsession with governance, traces our history with conciliar and connexional forms, and offers an alternative to energy-draining church meetings.

We are privileged to include Foster Freed's account of his spiritual journey in our "Heart of the Matter" column. An intriguing aspect of his testimony is the influence of two remarkable pastoral leaders, Clifford Elliott and William Sloane Coffin. And then there is the impact of full-throated congregational hymn-singing! Our Profile features William Scott, a United Church missionary to Korea, who played a key role in the emergence of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, with which body the United Church has an official partnership. Hyuk Cho's text contains an unsettling reminder of a racist Canadian past in the form of a nativist song current in the early twentieth century. Three book reviews round out this number.

Some readers of this issue are new to *Touchstone*, having received a copy as a result of a promotional offer circulated through Infopac. I welcome these readers and invite them to join our little community by becoming subscribers. May all who read this number be encouraged by its affirmation of the church as a cherished instrument in the hands of God.

Peter Wyatt

GOD'S OWN GIFT: GLIMPSING TOMORROW'S CHURCH TODAY

by Edwin Searcy

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you (Isa. 43:1-2).

“Do not fear.” “You are mine.” “I will be with you.” This is the surprising news that God—through the prophet Isaiah—speaks into the despairing souls of congregations that find energies dwindling, numbers depleting and doors closing. Exiled far from their familiar home, they no longer know how to navigate the cultural map of a strange new twenty-first century world. The evidence suggests that it is only a matter of time before this people is no more, subsumed into the culture of consumption in which it now swims. But the prophet sees otherwise. There is a future for the people God has brought into being.

After over three decades of ministry in The United Church of Canada, I must confess that it has taken me most of that time to come to believe God's promise to be true. It did not take long to realize that the congregations I served were struggling to adapt to huge cultural shifts that made their traditional patterns and familiar models increasingly unsustainable. But it has been much more difficult to accept that the future of these congregations was not dependent upon me, their minister, or upon themselves—but upon the God who creates and forms them.

Somehow along the way I began to hear and to see evidence of the One who speaks this unlikely promise through the prophet Isaiah. Life took us through deep water together. We had our share of baptisms by fire. Being followers of Jesus Christ meant journeying through the valley of the shadow as often as through green pastures. In the congregation that I now have served for nearly two decades, it meant letting go of the church building that had been so central to its identity. It meant learning how to be a church without owning something that we called “the church.” But the main thing we have learned along the way is that God—as promised—has been with us; the waters have not overwhelmed us; we

need not have been afraid.

Yet why does God continue to call out and to form congregations (Greek, *synagōgai*) and assemblies (Greek, *ekklēsia*) that are known by God's name? Isaiah voices God's answer: "Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'" (Isa. 43:5-7). God pledges to call together a church from this generation's scattered offspring "for my glory." The glory of God is, in Hebrew, the *kabod* of God. It is, literally, the weight of God. God's glory is God's gravitas. It is God's huge energy for life and awesome power for newness. God is forever forming a people whose life together is meant to testify to the glory of God "as though reflected in a mirror" (2 Cor. 3:18).

To be honest, this can be difficult news for pastors and congregations. We can forget God's intention in calling out a holy ("set-apart") people. We can begin to dream of a church that is shaped by our grand visions. This is not a new problem. Before speaking a word of hope to the exiled community, Isaiah speaks a word of judgment to a forgetful people: "You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, 'He did not make me'; or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" (Isa. 29:16). Writing out of his experience within the Confessing Church of Germany in the 1930s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed that

on innumerable occasions a whole Christian community has been shattered because it has lived on the basis of a wishful image . . . The bright day of Christian community dawns wherever the early morning mists of dreamy visions are lifting . . . Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God.¹

How I wish I had remembered these stories when we spent entire Saturdays in attempts to brainstorm a mission statement for our church. As if Jesus has not already given us a big enough and good enough mission.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 35, 37, 38.

But how are we to recognize the shape of the community that God is forming among us? What are the features of a congregation that reflects, as in a mirror, “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6)? These are the primary questions that have emerged in my ministry as I have struggled to let go of my dreams of what a congregation should be. Looking back, things began to shift when wrestling with these questions became central in the congregation’s conversation. We had been thinking of the church as one more voluntary association requiring generous volunteers to keep it going. Now we are learning to receive the church as a gift from God, sustained by the energy—the glory—of God.

The shift is noticed in small but significant ways. Instead of thanking people when they step forward to take a share in our common ministry we are learning to thank God for calling them to serve and for giving them the energy to do so. Instead of imagining that, as the pastor, I am like a manager who is responsible for “running the church,” I am learning to see myself as a gardener whose vocation is to cultivate God’s garden.² Some seasons are fertile, others are barren. The pastor’s calling is faithfully to tend the garden through abundant harvests and through times of blight and drought that are often beyond her control. These subtle shifts in the way we speak about the church teach us to put the emphasis on what God is up to in our life together. They remind us that the church is God’s creation, not our own. Slowly we recover our trust in God to create and form a people in our time and place. We begin to notice that we are no longer afraid or overly anxious about the future, that we are living less in despair and more in hope, and that we are being given eyes to see God’s new growth.

An eye-opening moment for us in University Hill Congregation³ came when we were introduced to five marks of Christian communal life. We discovered them in a book by Maria Harris, who maintains that the development of educational curriculum in congregational life involves a holy participation in God’s fashioning of a people.⁴ She posits that the

² See “Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 142-182.

³ <http://www.uhill.net>.

⁴ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John

medium which is the material of God's artistic endeavour in forming the church is a set of forms—or marks—of Christian community that are first named in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:42, 44-47).

There we find in one place the most detailed description of the first Christian community doing what will in time become the classical activities of ecclesial ministry: *kerygma*, proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection; *didache*, the activity of teaching; *liturgia*, coming together to pray and re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread; *koinonia*, or community; and *diakonia*, caring for those in need.⁵

With these five marks of Christian communal life we are given a language to describe the shape of the community that God is forming among us. They act as lenses through which we glimpse signs of new life in the garden of God's kingdom that is breaking in upon us. As with any new language, we have learned this grammar and vocabulary step by step, taking time to focus on each mark in particular.⁶ But the purpose of a language is to become proficient so that the community is capable of improvisational speech. This creative speaking and living is what is seen and heard when a congregation learns to live the gospel language that is its core curriculum. The marks—like words in speech and like crops in a garden—form an eco-system that cultivates the well-being of the whole. These five fundamental expressions of Christian life work in concert with one another, encouraging the growth of God's glory in the congregation's life together.

The Five “Marks”

Kerygma is at the heart of the church's life. *Kerygma* means “proclaiming,” “announcing,” “preaching.” A congregation lacking *kerygma* is a community without the extraordinary news—“The Message”—that is the church's reason for being. The *kerygma* is not simply a neighbourly commitment to generic values of hope, faith and love or to peace and justice. The gospel is not the best of humankind's

Knox Press, 1989), 16.

⁵ Harris, *Fashion Me*, 16.

⁶ Learning the Greek words for these marks is a means of reminding us that they emerged out of the experience of the early church and that they connect us with Christians across time, space and denominational affiliation.

attempts to reach out to God. It is, instead, the incredible announcement that, in Jesus Christ, God has broken into history to save and redeem the creation. The good news is a cruciform story of God's capacity to bear the world's suffering and to overcome the powers of death. A kerygmatic congregation is learning that the glory of the God it meets in Jesus Christ is, paradoxically, revealed in weakness. To paraphrase Paul, believers long for proof (signs) that God is real while unbelievers expect a reasonable contemporary spirituality (wisdom) but the church announces Christ murdered (crucified), a scandal to believers and idiocy to unbelievers (1 Cor. 1:22-23). The church that God grows springs from the seeds of the cross and resurrection. Where this message takes root and comes to flower one finds a people undeterred by hardship, unsurprised by tragic loss, and unprepared to give up on the least and the last because it is coming to trust in the power of God to make new.

Didache (pronounced "did-a-kay") means "teaching," "formation," "training." It is a mark of Christian community because the church is a school. In it we are taught the Way of Jesus Christ in the same manner that apprentices are taught a trade—through lifelong practice in repentance and confession, in forgiveness and reconciliation, in servanthood and sacrifice, in pastoral care and in social witness. *Didache* is less about learning a body of knowledge and more about becoming a new people. A congregation that bears the mark of *didache* is not a "come as you are, stay as you are" church. Resistance to the notion of conversion is dwindling in such places, for these are communities in which people increasingly long to be converted from the anxiety-producing ways of the world to the peaceable way of God's kingdom come. In their desire to learn a new way of life—to "learn Christ" (Eph. 4:20)—such congregations evoke memories of the name claimed by the early Christian community—"The Way" (Acts 9:2). Here Christian education is not simply a matter of teaching children to become believing adults. Here the whole congregation is made up of disciples—students—who are learning how to live a new life as adopted children in the household of God. Here it is clear that once we have heard the kerygma—the good news—nothing can stay the same.

Liturgia literally means “work of the people.” In the ancient Roman world aqueducts were liturgical structures, that is, public works. Christian worship is a public work that is intended to benefit the world that the church inhabits. Christian worship is not a consumer activity meant to meet the needs of those who gather to worship. Those who worship gather to offer themselves to God on behalf of the world and to be sent into the world as Jesus’ servants on behalf of God. The early Christian community renamed Sunday as the Lord’s Day (often calling it the Eighth Day of Creation—an entirely new day of the week) as a constant reminder that Christian worship is the praise and response of a people whose life together is rooted in the startling, transforming resurrection news of Easter Sunday. On Sunday the church brings with it the harsh truth about the world’s Good Friday ache and grief, as well as its Holy Saturday longing and emptiness. Then, in Word and Sacrament, it meets the Easter God who, in Jesus Christ, brings to birth a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Here the gospel is revealed to be both intensely personal and radically social. Nothing and no one is beyond God’s power to raise from the dead. God’s glory is revealed when the liturgy is an enactment of this gospel drama and when the gathered congregation are its actors.

Koinonia translates into words like “community,” “fellowship” and “participation.” It is the root word for “coin” which refers to coinage as everyday currency in common usage. Christian communal life—Christian koinonia—is everyday community in Jesus Christ. It is the place where we practise loving the neighbour and loving the enemy. In the community of fellow Christians we hurt and are hurt, learn to forgive and be forgiven. Sin and brokenness are no strangers to the Christian life. This is no zone of perfection. Rather it is a flawed human community being saved by the amazing grace of God—not by our capacity to get life right. In Christian community we are invited to un-learn our proud independence and to re-learn the humility of mutual dependence. When Christian koinonia is in bountiful supply the church’s common currency includes the bearing of one another’s burdens. The mark of koinonia is a reminder that the Christian life is necessarily social. For if God—the Three in One—is, by definition a community, then the glory of God is always intending, creating and building koinonia. In a culture of increasing social isolation,

the church lives a counter-cultural alternative in which God calls into being a people being taught to love God and to love neighbour, a community called church.

Diakonia is the root word for our terms “deacon,” “deaconess” and “diaconal.” In the world of the New Testament it refers to the role of a slave or a servant. (In Latin the word slave is “minister” and slavery is “ministry.”) *Diakonia* exhibits the ways in which the church, as a slave of Christ, is obedient to Jesus who, after washing his disciples’ feet, says: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also ought to love one another” (John 13:34). When the church wonders where the boundaries of such extravagant love might be drawn, it is reminded of the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25:31-46). These explosive parables announce that God’s love ignores the boundaries of care and concern that we have set and maintained. They alert the church to the news that Jesus is unexpectedly present incognito in the hungry other, the imprisoned outcast, the forgotten invalid and the lonely stranger. Surprising hospitality to the other, the outcast, the forgotten and the stranger is a hallmark of God’s glory. Its emergence in community is a crucial sign that God is calling the church into being once more.

Cause for Hope

The mainline church in North America continues to experience a long, slow, seemingly inevitable decline in numbers, energy and capacity. Buildings close, one by one. Congregations shrink, merge and look for some last gasp of survival. A variety of experiments in alternative Christian community offers the luring promise of a way ahead. Anxiety, sadness, desperation and fatigue are the marks of many a congregation and church leader. It is a long season of depletion, perhaps of judgment, certainly of endings.

Why, then, do I find myself increasingly confident that God is up to something new and that the church we know is, even now, in the labour pains of birth? Perhaps it is because the church has been through far worse trouble than this. Perhaps it is because the global church is mostly in a time of growth, not of decay. However, I suspect that my increasing

confidence is mainly a result of what I have been privileged to witness over these past eighteen years in a small congregation being born again on the other side of loss. In our case, when the church as a building was lost, the church as a people was found. We discovered that it is, after all, the Message, and not the location, that binds us together. It is not evident that the University Hill Congregation will survive the great transition that the church is weathering in our generation. But we may have been given a glimpse of the church that is being born through this transition.

The church that is being born is not wealthy, not powerful, not impressive in human terms. The church that God is calling into being reflects the glory of a God met in humility, a God who welcomes the last and the least, a God who is crucified and risen. To be a pastor or a member of the church in such a time is to learn to look forward with hope, unafraid of the rising waters. At this hinge-time between the old and the new we are called to watch for signs of growth—the ancient marks of God's future church—when they sprout like new shoots from the stump (Isa. 6:13) or like seeds on good soil (Mark 4:8). Then we will give God the glory and go to work in the garden.

BONHOEFFER: A POST-COLONIAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

by Wendy Fletcher

In each of the 25 years I have worked in and for church institutions, we have been trying to live our discipleship in the midst of a rapidly shifting context. What was understood as normative and expected is no longer.

Through the disorientation of rapid change, the question of identity presses hard: What is the church of today called to be? What is the church of tomorrow? As the descendants of the historic colonial churches, what does it mean for us to be faithful to our baptismal birth rite in an era when our proclamation tends to fall on culturally deaf ears? In the aftermath of multiple harms woven into the text of the Canadian church's story as a colonizing institution—led by, but not limited to, the trauma of residential schools—how do we imagine the life and work of church?

Amidst the flurry of theological activity related to figuring out these questions, there is one theologian especially whose name appears in the efforts at reimagining our church: Dietrich Bonhoeffer. From the *Death of God* theologians in the 1960s, who used Bonhoeffer's critique of classical formulations of the place of God in the human story as a pillar in their arguments for a world beyond theism, to the largely a-historical spirit-based model of the Harvey Cox school, to the current emerging church thinking, Bonhoeffer is identified with the key phrase that can be lifted from his texts and made to serve the purpose of new ecclesiology: *religionless Christianity*.¹ Across the ecclesial street,

¹ J.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 38-41.

Robinson draws on Bonhoeffer's critique of the reduction of God to a panacea for human ills as a plank in his argument in favour of a theology beyond theism which rejects notions of transcendence. Bonhoeffer himself would not have made such a move, as his theology pivots on a reconciliation story which is in the end entirely dependent on God in Jesus Christ—christocentrism. In *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) Harvey Cox presents the argument that the immediately preceding 1500 years of the Christian story can be characterized as the age of belief—a moribund dogmatic age which led to little life and vitality. In contradistinction to that, he argues that we are currently in the age of the Spirit wherein God is acting in power for vitality and liveliness. This general characterization posits a false dichotomy between spirit and belief, and frames the broader story of Christian history

amidst more reputedly conservative theological voices, Bonhoeffer's work in the area of Christian community as a *hidden community* has gained currency as an argument for withdrawal from a world named as secular, or as in the case of the work of neo-orthodox thinker, Miroslav Wolf, rejected as sectarian and only appropriate for the particular era of National Socialism.²

In these locations where ecclesiology is the pressing question, we see Bonhoeffer referred to as a necessary dialogue partner—but, in the end, not serving well. On the one hand, we end up not with *religionless Christianity*, but with *Christless* or *churchless Christianity*, and, on the other, a pseudo-utopian community that withdraws from the world. Bonhoeffer would have been horrified at the thought of either of these options.

It is my contention that the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer does in fact hold a very significant key for the elaboration of an ecclesiological model that can sustain us in this next generation of the change-time. However, it is not a model that reflects the interpretations so broadly and generally given by the voices named above.

Bonhoeffer argues for a church both deeply committed to its own tradition through the study of Scripture, prayers, rites and creeds of the Christian faith (the arcane discipline of the hidden community) *and* one which paradoxically relates to the world with a radical proselytization, a proselytization that is wordless. Rather than speaking words of faith into a culture for which these words have no meaning, Bonhoeffer summons the community of faith to *be* the broken body of Christ in the world; for disciples to en flesh the meaning of a crucified and risen Lord as the only means of reaching toward the world today. Bonhoeffer imagines for us a church that is both deeply embedded in the history from which it comes, and is also freed from the harm caused by that history, as it reaches

(wherein many periods of prior vitality and spirit-based movements are in evidence) as a simplistic and a-historical reductionism. Emerging church theorists such as Diana Butler Bass assume Cox's analysis without engaging it, thereby replicating the problematic of his analysis and interpretation of Bonhoeffer and others. *Christianity after Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 18-19; 28; 30-31.

² Miroslav Wolf, *A Public Faith: How Followers Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 89.

toward the world in wordless evangelization, a missiology of action, life lived rather than merely spoken.

Bonhoeffer is a man of *both/and* theology. His rule of life as articulated in his final writings, gathered together by his friend and brother-in-law, Eberhard Bethge, and known to us as the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, might be summarized as *pray and act*. Both frame the parameters of the Christian life.

Bonhoeffer's Context

As a German theologian born into considerable social privilege, Bonhoeffer cannot be understood apart from his historical context. He died in a Nazi prison camp in April, 1945, at the age of 38, after two years of incarceration for his participation in the *Abwehr* movement of resistance to Hitler's regime. Bonhoeffer spent his adult life as a Lutheran pastor and theologian. He was a seminal participant in the development of the *Confessing Church*, a group of Protestant pastors who insisted that commitment to Jesus Christ rather than Hitler was an essential principle of Christianity.

However, Bonhoeffer went beyond others in the group in his opposition to National Socialism. Rather than resting with the confession that Jesus is Lord, as articulated in the Barmen Confession, he insisted that one must *live* Jesus as Lord. To *live* Jesus as Lord would in the end cost more than signing a faith statement. In the end, he critiqued the very Confessing Church he had helped to develop for its unwillingness to risk its own life and survival by opposing the policies of National Socialism. It was his own commitment to action beyond confession, and resistance beyond theological declarations, that led to his eventual imprisonment and death. In this choice he modelled the theological paradigm to which he summoned the church of his era and, I believe, of ours.

Bonhoeffer's Writings

Theologians have tended to shore up their theological positions by drawing from one segment or another of Bonhoeffer's writings. For example, theologians have borrowed terms such as "religionless

Christianity” and “world come of age” from the fragmentary last letters of Bonhoeffer, without situating them in the broader context of his earlier writings. Likewise, those who would argue for a Christian community that inclines toward disengagement from the world have drawn selected texts from his earlier work without broader reference to his later work and the story of his own life choices.

To interpret Bonhoeffer’s meaning, several key works must be considered in relation to one another. Each of the works referred to here were written during the time of National Socialism. Most of his published work in fact derives from the era of Hitler’s Germany, with his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, published in 1927, a key exception. In this article, his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, collected and published after his death for the first time in 1951, will be interpreted in relation to his earlier works from the decade between 1932 and 1942: *Cost of Discipleship*, written between 1935 and 1936 and first published in 1937; *Life Together*, written in one month in September, 1938, and published for the first time in 1939; *Ethics*, developed in the years immediately prior to his arrest in 1943, but never finished, and first published in 1949.³

What is the Church?

Last words in any story are important. Among the last words written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a short piece entitled, “Outline for a Book.” In this brief text we are able to see his near-to-final reflections on the church and the questions that, for him, remained to be answered.

He concluded that the church is only the church when it is there for

³ *Discipleship*, conceived in 1932, the year Hitler rose to power, was not written and published until some years later. It reflects Bonhoeffer’s own leadership in resistance to National Socialism, predominantly through an extended reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. *Life Together* was written as a reflection coming out of Bonhoeffer’s experience of having run the illegal Confessing Church seminary at Finkenwalde for two years. *Ethics* functions as Bonhoeffer’s *magnum opus*. Unlike *Discipleship*, it looks beyond the struggle of the church to the time beyond the war when the world would be engaged in the tasks of reconstruction and the responsibilities of Christians in and to that world. *Letters and Papers from Prison* collects the existing correspondence among Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Bethge and other key individuals during his imprisonment at Tegel Prison.

others⁴ and named the vices of the church as hubris, worship of power, envy and illusionism. He argued for the needed virtues of moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty and contentment;⁵ and summoned the church to engagement with the world as participation in the tasks of the world, not “by dominating but by helping and serving.”⁶ He argues that the church’s word gains weight and power, “not through concepts but by example.” It is only through being the broken body of Christ in and for the world that the meaning of the Christian gospel can be communicated.

Bonhoeffer summons the church to a radical faith which participates in the being of Jesus in every form—his humanity, his cross and resurrection. He argues in his “Outline” that our relationship with God is no “religious” relationship to “some highest, most powerful and best being imaginable.”⁷ Such a relationship for him bears no genuine transcendence. Rather, Bonhoeffer summons us as the church to a new life in being there for others through participation in the being of Jesus.

In these close to last words of Bonhoeffer, we see his earlier theology of incarnation reaffirmed. In his *Ethics*, drawing on the work of Luther, he turned the theology of incarnation on its head, arguing that the meaning of Jesus is not that we change our form and become divine: our true dignity is to be truly human, as Jesus, according to the Chalcedonian definition, was truly human.⁸ The centrality of this deeply incarnational christology in Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology cannot be overstated. As critical as was his commitment to the humanity of Jesus, so was his affirmation of that humanity in the context of the larger

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 503. Bonhoeffer makes the radical but apparently offhand comment here that, as a first step, the church must give away all of its property to those in need and that its clergy should live not on salary but on the freewill offering of their congregations, or be employed in secular vocations.

⁵ *LPP*, “Outline for a Book,” 503.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 500.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6: Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 6.

project of God's redemption of the world. The humanism of Bonhoeffer was clearly a *Christian* humanism: the reconciliation of God and the world is achieved through the action and initiative of God in Jesus Christ.⁹

To *be* the body of Christ *in the world* is, for Bonhoeffer, God's project for the church. Any attempt to interpret Bonhoeffer as a sectarian secessionist arguing for the withdrawal of Christians from the world misses the larger framework of his theology that rejects the "two kingdoms" theology of his Lutheran inheritance. In *Ethics*, he spends considerable energy deconstructing Luther's notion that there are two worlds, one ecclesial and grace-infused, the other secular and law-oriented. Writing within the context of National Socialism, Bonhoeffer was deeply concerned that the church might withdraw from responsibility in the secular realm by relying on a false dichotomy between sacred and secular. Christian ethics is about "participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today and doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God."¹⁰

Religionless Christianity

Although engaging the world as a missiological project has long been the church's perceived *raison d'être*, the contribution of Bonhoeffer's reflections on *religionless Christianity* invites the church to re-think the form of that missiological project. It is beyond proselytization or exhortation to right belief, and rather an invitation to an engaged spiritual practice whereby we lose our life to help others find theirs, and participate in the reconciliation of all things in God.

There are actually very few uses of the term *religionless Christianity* in the *Letters and Papers from Prison* (the only place in Bonhoeffer's writing where the term appears).¹¹ The heart of its usage can be found in a letter which he wrote to Eberhard Bethge on April 30,

⁹ *Ethics*, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *LPP*, 361-367. The observations included here are all drawn from the letter dated 30 April 1944.

1944; in it he struggles with the question of what Christianity is for us and who Christ is for us today. For Bonhoeffer, these two aspects of faith are inseparable. Struggling with this relationship between a christology and an ecclesiology (which together frame his ethics) for his era, he affirms the emerging critique of religion in the work of his colleague and friend, Karl Barth. However, he criticizes Barth for affirming a positivism of revelation, arguing that the world of modernity has become *de facto* religionless. Those who claim to be religious in the Christian world in fact are “the last of the knights or a few intellectually dishonest people.”¹²

The mistake to be avoided here is any notion that, because Bonhoeffer posits the end of religion, he is arguing for the end of Christianity, the body of Christ as a gathered community or the real presence of Christ himself in the world. Instead, he summons the Christian community to a far more radical form of engagement with, and practice of, its faith. Bonhoeffer goes on to pose this key question:

How can Christ become Lord of the religionless as well? Is there such a thing as a religionless Christian? . . . How do we speak (or perhaps we can no longer “speak” the way we used to) in a “worldly” way about God? How do we go about being “religionless worldly” Christians; how can we be ecclesiastically those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously as privileged instead seeing ourselves belonging wholly to the world? Christ then would be no longer the object of religion, but something else entirely, truly lord of the world. But what does that mean? In a religionless situation what do ritual and prayer mean? Is this where the “arcane discipline” or the difference . . . between the penultimate and the ultimate have new significance?¹³

The core of Bonhoeffer’s intention is revealed in this one passage. Christ is Lord of the world. The categories of religion, religious language and

¹² *LPP*, 362.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 363-364.

religious practice have not only become meaningless in modernity; they have impeded the communication of the meaning of Christ in and to the world.

In the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer uses the term “world come of age.” He observes that God has been pushed out of the world by modernity, that the world of modernity no longer has need of God to answer its questions.¹⁴ Observing that liberal Christianity has tried, in the face of Enlightenment losses, to offer a defence of God as necessary to bolster humanity in its weakness, Bonhoeffer argues that the question of Jesus Christ in a *world come of age* requires a different tack. Rather than “smuggling God in somewhere,” he advocates a truer recognition of our situation before God.¹⁵ The truth and particularity of our situation, as he sees it, is that the God who makes us to live in the world without the hypothesis of God is the same God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God, we live without God.

Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world as *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help. To this extent one may say that the previously described development of the world’s coming of age, which has cleared the way by eliminating a false notion of God, frees us to see the God of the Bible who gains ground and power in the world by being powerless.¹⁶

The key to Bonhoeffer’s notion of *religionless Christianity* is understanding what he takes “religion” to mean. He does not confuse the core practices of faith in community with religion. To interpret religiously is to interpret “metaphysically on the one hand and individualistically on the other.”¹⁷ In contrast, the community of Christ is called to interpret communally and in the context of this world. From

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer himself did not coin the phrase “world come of age.” He had encountered it while reading Dilthey’s *Weltanschauung und Analyses*, and in his correspondence with Bethge considered its ramifications for Christianity in the age of modernity.

¹⁵ *LPP*, 478.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 478.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 372.

this distinction follows Bonhoeffer's intention with regard to *religionless Christianity* and continuing life in faith.

Naming Three Practices

So how do we practise the meaning and presence of Christ without replicating the errors of religious history? In the first instance, we must reconfigure our relationship to power, as is suggested by Bonhoeffer's understanding of where God stands in relation to history. Second, we may not be able to use words at all: action must articulate the gospel. Third, Bonhoeffer argues that we must practise what he has referred to elsewhere as the "arcane discipline" of the Christian community. These three areas show us the heart of both the missiological and ecclesiological dimensions of his latest theological voice.

Deconstructing Power. The problem of Christianity's relationship to power throughout its history is a concern that occupies Bonhoeffer through the decade of the 1930s. In *Discipleship* in particular, he considers the ways in which the church has subverted the work of God through the self-interested use of power.¹⁸ His indictment of the conventional church is clear: at no point should Christians concern themselves with questions that refer only to the self or its interest, for to do so frames self and world as the ultimate realities. The body of Christ is summoned to "live an ethic which presupposes a decision about ultimate reality, namely a decision of faith."¹⁹ The ethical question for the disciple must always be: "What is the will of God?"

Action: Talk is Cheap. Bonhoeffer's concern with traditional forms of word-based evangelism is not limited to his later correspondence. Even in earlier works we see him struggling with the very question of words and evangelization. In *Discipleship*, he prescribes clear limits to the idea of Christian witness as verbal evangelism or proselytization.

But it is not only judging words which are forbidden to the

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4: Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 46-50.

¹⁹ *Ethics*, 47.

disciples. Proclaiming salvific words of forgiveness to others also has its limits. Jesus' disciples do not have the power or right to force them on anyone at any time. All our urging, running after people, proselytizing, every attempt to accomplish something in another person by our own power is vain and dangerous.²⁰

Very early in his writing, Bonhoeffer understood that the vocation of the Christian community has more to do with action than words:

God will not ask us someday whether our confession was evangelical, but whether we did God's will. God will ask that of everyone, including us . . . The former justify themselves by their confession; the latter, the doers, are the people who obediently trust in God's grace. People's speech here is correlated with their self-righteousness, and their deeds are correlated with that grace, before which people cannot do anything else except humbly obey and serve.²¹

Throughout the years of National Socialism, Bonhoeffer was insistent in his theology that the Christian gospel was something to be lived and practised in the first and last instance. In Bonhoeffer's early text on costly discipleship, he writes about "cheap grace" as the mortal enemy of the church and as the justification of the sin but not of the sinner. He denounces a church which preaches forgiveness of sins as though it had the capacity to offer grace on its own, a church which offers the comfort of grace without repentance.²² He argues that discipleship of the baptized is bound to the suffering of Christ.²³ The Christian life summons us to live as a self-offering toward the well-being of the world on the example of Christ. Our joy and our purpose are

²⁰ *Discipleship*, 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

²² *Ibid.*, 43. "Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, as a principle, as a system. It means forgiveness of sins as a general truth; it means God's love as merely a Christian idea of God. Those who affirm it have already had their sins forgiven. The church that teaches this doctrine of grace thereby confers such grace on itself. The world finds in this church a cheap cover-up for its sins, for which there is no remorse and from which it has even less desire to be set free. Cheap grace is, thus, denial of God's living words, denial of incarnation of the word of God."

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.

realized in the companionship we make with the Christ in this journey.

In a reflection which he wrote on the occasion of the baptism of his nephew and godson Dietrich Bethge in May, 1944, Bonhoeffer states this clearly:

Our church has been fighting during these years only for its self-preservation as if that were an end in itself. It has become incapable of bringing the word of reconciliation and redemption to humankind and to the world. So the words we used before must lose their power, must be silenced and we can be Christian in only two ways: through prayer and in doing justice among human beings.²⁴

Bonhoeffer does believe that a new day will come when speech will be meaningful again. He postulates, however, that it will be a new language and perhaps a non-religious language, and that that day is not yet.

Arcane Discipline. The form of discipleship for which Bonhoeffer is calling in his idea of *religionless Christianity* does not stand only on the one leg of action in the world. Rather it stands also on the practice of what he names as the “arcane discipline” of the hidden or secret community. The radical self-giving discipleship for which he calls cannot be realized without the grace and empowerment of God. It also cannot be realized without participation in communal living—prayerfully, eucharistically and biblically, beyond the individualism of modernity.

Bonhoeffer is clear that in and of ourselves we do not have the capacity for the imperative of self-giving to which the gospel draws us. The questions the gospel poses in the end are not questions about the individual’s well-being.²⁵ For him, the biblical witness demonstrates fundamental concern for the righteousness of God and God’s kingdom here on earth. What matters is how this world is reconciled and renewed. Toward that end God empowers us for our vocation in community, in the

²⁴ *LPP*, 389.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 372. “Hasn’t the individualistic question of saving our personal souls almost faded away for most of us? . . . Isn’t God’s righteousness and kingdom on earth the centre of everything?”

body of Christ.

For Bonhoeffer, the need for the church to be open to the world by existing for others does not imply surrender either of its identity or of the mystery of faith in Christ.²⁶ The community of Christ is to live together so that the mysteries of faith not only will be protected from profanation but also remain as living empowerment for the work and being of the body of Christ. In letters sent from Tegel Prison, he writes about the need for the church to recover the “arcane discipline” of the early church. In particular, he insists that prayer, worship, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and the creed, along with intensive study of the Scriptures, should be safeguarded at the centre of the community’s life. A fuller elaboration of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the necessary practices of community life for Christians is found in his earlier work, *Life in Community*. From that text, we are able to flesh out Bonhoeffer’s meaning of the *arcane discipline* as he envisioned its application.²⁷

Bonhoeffer was adamant that these hidden realities should not be forced upon the world. The world would know the church only through its self-offering and service in the world, its working for reconciliation, peace and justice. The virtues which empowered disciples for this life in the world would be nurtured through the maintenance of ancient practices and the rituals of faith in the hidden life of the community.

Both/And

We can see that Bonhoeffer argues very clearly for a radical form of engagement with the world in a self-offering that expresses the work of God’s reconciliation in creation. As well, we see that he argues passionately for the retention of the core aspects of Christian tradition necessary for the empowerment of the community as it struggles to find its way to faithful discipleship in each succeeding generation. Most

²⁶ LPP, 29. Editor’s commentary.

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5: Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 30-32. “Therefore Christians need other Christians who speak God’s Word to them. They need them again and again when they become disheartened because, living by their own resources, they cannot help themselves without cheating themselves out of the divine word of salvation.”

notably, he retains clear sight of the reliance of the community on Jesus: “Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this and none that is less than this.”²⁸

The Canadian Church

I would argue with Bonhoeffer that the day for speech as the primary work of Christian witness in the world is both long past and not yet. We still have many miles to go beyond our story of colonial harm, and of broken relationships, both with First Nations persons and also, in many places, with the culture at large, before mission as a speech-act can walk with us as discipleship practice. As surely as Bonhoeffer’s church at the end of the Second World War stood at the edge of a new day, requiring a particular stance before God and the world, so too do we.

Bonhoeffer’s model of *religionless Christianity* with its three key practices holds wisdom for our next becoming. It summons us to reconfigure our relationship to power beyond self-interest; to live in the world as a self-offering with Christ by grace for the well-being of the world, beyond colonizing words; to hold fast to the *arcane disciplines* of our faith as necessary practices for discipleship in this generation. What such practices might mean for us, only tomorrow will show.

Bonhoeffer’s final words to his godson on his baptismal day may in the end be also for us. With those last words he prophesied that until the new way dawned, the Christian cause would be a quiet and hidden one, but that there would be people in the meantime who would pray and do justice, and wait, “for God’s own time.” With the words of Proverbs 4.18, Bonhoeffer blessed his godson on his way and with those words may we also be blessed: “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”²⁹

²⁸ *Life Together*, 31.

²⁹ *LPP*, 390.

WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS

by Aaron Miller

It is sometimes fashionable to argue that the church is a dispensable part of God's mission. Biblically speaking, that is a tenuous argument. Glib statements, like "Jesus is my Saviour, not my religion," miss the point. The testimony of the New Testament is that "church" in one form or another is the direct result of the incarnation—the life, death, resurrection and ascension—of Jesus Christ. Church is what happens when people are faithful witnesses to the saving action of God, in and for the world, in Jesus Christ. While we might disagree over the institutional shape, Scripture makes it clear that gathering—*ecclesia*—under, and as a witness to, the lordship of Jesus Christ is normative for all Christians.

Unfortunately, it is the institutional issues that tend to distract and dismay us, as often as not. In one of its most important papers, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches tackles the challenge of defining the nature and mission of the church in the context of complex ecumenical dialogue. The Commission observes:

Many insights pertinent to the nature and mission of the Church are present in Scripture although it does not offer a systematic ecclesiology . . . Scripture is normative and therefore provides a uniquely privileged source for understanding the nature and mission of the Church.¹

This is an appropriate caveat and a comforting word of grace for anyone who sits down to write an article on the subject of biblical ecclesiology. On the one hand, it is an important reminder that no person or Christian community will exhaust the ecclesial possibilities found in Scripture—let alone those arising from theological and contextual reflection upon Scripture. Indeed, scripturally speaking, "diversity appears not as accidental to the life of the Christian community, but as an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects the fact that it is part of the Father's

¹ "The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement," Faith and Order Paper 198, Geneva, WCC, 2005, 6. Hereafter referred to as NMC.

design that the story of salvation in Christ be incarnational.”² On the other hand, that very fact compels Christians in every context to turn to the Word of God joyfully and humbly, seeking to grow ever more into our high calling as the body of Christ, each member “[growing] up in every way into him who is the head” (Eph. 4:15, NRSV).

With this in mind, I want to consider one particular passage among the many possibilities in Scripture, a passage that I believe to be a useful grounding for thinking about what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ in and for the world.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed from on high. Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God (Luke 24:44-53).

I believe that this passage provides us with adequate imaginative space to examine our individual churches in context, as well as a framework for exploring what it is that makes us “one holy, catholic and apostolic church.” We see in this intimate moment between Jesus and his followers the “nature and mission of the Church” beginning to take shape.

² NMC, *ibid.*

The nature of the Church, out of which its mission is derived,³ is twofold: the church is the “creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ At the end of Luke’s Gospel we see this coming clear. The passage is roughly bracketed by Jesus’ teaching regarding the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the promise of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:44-47,49). Between the fulfillment of one promise and the anticipation of the other, we have the essence of the church’s mission as witness to the crucified and risen Messiah, and of repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name, for all nations.

The pericope begins with the disruptive Word of God—doubly so, as Jesus, the Word made flesh, interprets the Scriptures. The descriptions of the disciples in the verses leading into this passage are evidence of this disruption: “they were startled and terrified”; “in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering” (Luke 24:37,41). Then, as Jesus speaks, opening their minds to understand the promises and hopes of Scripture that have arrived in him, there is a discernible breathlessness, a mounting excitement that pervades these final verses of Luke’s gospel, culminating in joyful communal worship and the renewed blessing of God.

The church, properly oriented, “centered and grounded in the Word of God,”⁵ continually risks the disruption of that twofold Word. With the history of salvation spread open before us, and Jesus, crucified and risen, standing among us, it is quickly clear that God’s ways are not ours and that we are called to new and fresh obedience. In turn, the church, created, shaped and nurtured by the Word, hopes in its promise, responding in joyful worship and communal life that is pleasing to God.

However, it is worth reiterating that being centred and grounded in the Word of God, in Scripture and in Jesus, does not provide us with a straightforward way of being the church. Rather, it provides us with a formative story; a story rooted in history, into which we are drawn as we

³ “In [the Christian life], the imperative, ‘You ought,’ comes only after the indicative, ‘You are.’” William Willimon, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980), 29.

⁴ NMC, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

heed the call to follow Jesus, to “come and see” (John 1:39) what God is doing. Scripture reveals God’s redemptive work on the ground. Scripture reveals God at work in creation, present in dusty migrations and under scorching Egyptian sun, present in cloud and fire, and present in prayer and prophecy. Scripture denies us a God in abstract—no gnostic spiritualism, no deist remoteness.

This reality is amplified in the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Word made flesh. Most importantly for the church, this claim roots our identity in a specific event, which is the culmination of the Scriptures in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If the church is indeed “a creature of God’s Word,”⁶ then this is the specific event that we must deal with and the reality that shapes every Christian community. God’s presence and work in Jesus denies us a church in abstract—no “mystical church,”⁷ no church outside “the wisdom of God in its rich variety” (Eph. 3:10) as displayed in creation.

“And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The church is called into being by the Word of God in Scripture—the lived and recorded testimony of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1)—and in Christ, the Word incarnate. Ours is an incarnational faith; we are called to be a people of abundant life and visible action. However, what ought to be known and acknowledged is that the church is—mercifully—quite a bit more than what can be observed objectively. This is why Paul is able to call each of his congregations a gathering of “saints” without a blush of irony, in spite of their all too observable foibles and missteps, their varying and sometimes questionable degrees of faith.

What Paul implies is that the church we see in Scripture—as in our present contexts—is not simply, or even first and foremost, what is visible; it is, rather, the on-going work of God in and through God’s

⁶ NMC, 4.

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 141.

people.⁸ “The Church is both a divine and human reality.”⁹ The church is the work of the Holy Spirit; it “can never be fully and unequivocally grasped only in its visible appearance.”¹⁰

This is not in conflict with its incarnational nature, but rather, another reason for it. “Church is the core element in the strategy of the Holy Spirit for providing human witness and physical presence to the Jesus-inaugurated kingdom of God in this world. It is not that kingdom complete, but it is a witness to that kingdom.”¹¹ It is a “colony of heaven in the country of death,”¹² and every scriptural witness testifies to the fact that we are not able to be that on our own—the work of God is abundantly more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20).

It is worthy of reflection that Jesus’ first instruction, after he has given his disciples their apostolic mandate, is for them to stay put and wait for the Holy Spirit. Much anecdotal evidence, scriptural and otherwise, suggests that we get ourselves in the most trouble, and our greatest apostasies occur, when we charge ahead, implementing our own strategies for witnessing to the kingdom of God. Moreover, when we believe—explicitly or implicitly—that the church is mostly what we do, we neglect to take seriously the full challenge of the gospel, the “cosmic conflict with the enemy [into which all followers of Jesus are called], a conflict they can win only by the power of the Spirit.”¹³ Our first task as followers of Jesus is to wait for the promised gift. We are a community created by the Spirit and our mission derives from that creation.¹⁴ To think and act otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of the church and to distort its purpose and goal.¹⁵

⁸ Peterson, *Practice Resurrection*, 14-20.

⁹ NMC, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹ Peterson, *Practice Resurrection*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 82.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004), 224. Migliore writes: “Routine neglect and suspicion of the work of the Holy Spirit has damaging effects on both Christian life and Christian theology. It can lead to distortions in the understanding of God, the doctrine of Scripture, the significance

That said, there is certainly a legitimate argument to be made that “the institutional church has always looked on the experience of, and appeal to, the Spirit as potentially subversive and in need of control.”¹⁶ However, it also seems that in the face of post-modern angst regarding institutions, the subversion of the Spirit is often appealed to as a way of “throwing off everything that hinders” (Heb. 12:1). Indeed, this is one of the blessings of the Holy Spirit, and it ought to challenge our understanding of the church as an institution. Yet, we must bear in mind that the freedom of the Spirit is not the freedom to do as we please, but the freedom to submit to the reign of God in Christ, and so partake of the inheritance of grace that is ours.¹⁷ This is why I believe that it is necessary to include the account of Jesus’ ascension if this passage is to be a sufficient grounding text for embracing a robust, biblical ecclesiology.

Throughout the New Testament the coming of the Holy Spirit is directly linked to Christ’s ascension and reign, and, therefore, so is the church’s mission. The church is created by the Spirit, but to say so is as much a christological as a pneumatological claim.¹⁸ To say that the church is created by the Spirit is to acknowledge that it is not primarily a “discerner of and participant in God’s worldly sovereignty, but . . . the object of divine governance.”¹⁹ To acknowledge our creation by, and life in, the Spirit is to strive after our “full expression of living as a community under God’s reign.”²⁰

of the natural order, the value of human culture, the interpretation of Christ and his work, the nature of the church, the freedom of the Christian, and the hope for the final fulfillment of life.”

¹⁶ Migliore, *Faith*, 224.

¹⁷ See Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:18; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Peter 1:4.

¹⁸ John 14:12, 16:7ff., for instance.

¹⁹ Douglas John Hall and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *God and the Nations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 45. Hall observes: “[The Church] may have, in some profound sense, a particular relation to the God whose kingdom permeates the whole universe; but far from being a relation of mere privilege, this covenantal relation of the people of God to the ‘high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity’ is a relationship more of responsibilities than of rights.”

²⁰ Van Gelder, *Essence*, 25.

“You are witnesses of these things.”

If Word and Spirit define the nature of the church, establishing us firmly within the sphere of God’s reign, then it is safe to say that the mission of the church does not take place within cramped confines. Rather, the church sings with the psalmist, “[The Lord] brought me out into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me” (Ps. 18:19). It is to the broad scope of God’s grace that the church is witness: the gospel is for all nations. And so, in every context, Christians are called, in obedience to the Word and Spirit, to discern and to attest the gospel. The threefold witness to which Jesus’ words point, in the passage under consideration, provides us with more than ample space in which to live out the church’s apostolic vocation as witnesses of the Good News, as it takes shape in specific circumstances and settings, but also transcends any parochial captivity.

First, the church is a witness to the crucified and risen Messiah. To deal with all the implications of such a statement is well beyond the scope of this article, but it is the ecclesial foundation from which Christian mission arises (1 Cor. 3:11). We are “a movement—a people—that exists in the world under the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ: a movement and people called into being by his Spirit and being conformed to his person and furthering his work. A cruciform people.”²¹ We are called to be a people that exists as a sign of the kingdom of God, which is known most fully in the Easter mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection.²²

As a community whose mission is shaped by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the church is an eschatological community. This means that the church cannot exist for its own sake, but “as an instrument in God’s hands, for the transformation of the world.”²³ We proclaim the already completed action of God for the world that God so loves; and we live in anticipation of its fulfillment. We live within the mystery of our faith: “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come

²¹ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 137.

²² NMC, 29. See also N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 433-539.

²³ *Ibid.*

again.” “Sent as Christ’s disciples, the people of God must witness to and participate in God’s reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation,”²⁴ and follow the One through whom “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7:22-23). Though we do not always see everything we hope for, we continue to live by faith, in the hope of the One in whose name we have been called, whose saving work for the world is completed once for all (Heb. 2:8-9; 10:1-17).

Because of this, the church is a witness to repentance and forgiveness of sins. As witnesses to repentance, Christians heed, as well as proclaim, the call to a new way of life in Christ, being of one mind with him (Phil. 2:5). N. T. Wright makes a compelling argument that repentance, as Jesus uses it, has less to do with personal piety than with allegiance to the kingdom of God as revealed in the ministry of Jesus himself. He cites the Jewish historian, Josephus, who describes an incident that took place around AD 66, in which he persuaded a Galilean rebel leader to give up his brigandage, saying, “I would . . . condone his actions if he would show repentance and prove his loyalty to me.” Wright notes, “The translation is accurate enough, but could just as well have been rendered, ‘if he would *repent and believe in me.*’”²⁵ This, of course, bears a striking resemblance to Mark’s account of Jesus’ opening proclamation, as he is Spirit-launched out of the wilderness. It also gives us a clue as to what “repentance” meant in the context in which Jesus utters it.²⁶ Although Luke’s Gospel does not include this particular story, the command of Luke 24:47 would seem to be an echo—this time not at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry, but as instruction for those who would carry on that ministry, doing the things that he does. Thus, to witness to repentance is to pledge allegiance to the kingdom of God, to give up our self-centred ways²⁷ and to live according to the will and way of God in Jesus, attested in the gospels, wherever we find ourselves.

²⁴ NMC, 11.

²⁵ Wright, *Jesus*, 250. The phrase is: *ei melloi metanoesein kai pistos emoi genesesthai*.

²⁶ Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17.

²⁷ See Matt. 10:38, 16:42; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23, 14:27.

To live as witnesses to the forgiveness of sins is also a kingdom mandate. The prophets promised that when God's reign was established, the restoration of God's people, including the forgiveness of sins, would be complete.²⁸ When Jesus announces the forgiveness of sins he proclaims "a new world order, the end of Israel's long desolation, the true and final 'forgiveness of sins,' the inauguration of the kingdom of god [sic]."²⁹ Scripturally speaking, the forgiveness of sins signals a new and fresh relationship with God, a renewed covenant, the return from exile.³⁰ As witnesses to this, "the Church is a gathering of Christians under God's relationality,"³¹ a community striving to live into the twofold commandment to love God and neighbour, through which we come to know eternal life, the grace of God, here and now (Luke 10:27).

Our passage from Luke provides us with no practical instructions for how to be the church. It points only indirectly to many significant aspects of ecclesial concern, such as sacraments. But I maintain that it does provide a clear enough framework through which we might understand, critique, challenge and rejoice in the church, from its Pentecost birth to the present, in first century Jerusalem and twenty-first century North America. At a time of change and anxiety in much of the church, I believe the passage offers a broad and imaginative space to reflect upon how each Christian community, in its context, is called to live in and for the world, as witnesses to the mission and will of God in Christ Jesus, on earth as in heaven.

²⁸ For example, Jer. 31, 33; Ezek. 36.

²⁹ Wright, *Jesus*, 272.

³⁰ Ibid. See Jer. 31, 33; Ezek. 36:24ff.

³¹ Peterson, *Practice Resurrection*, 245.

OBSESSED WITH GOVERNANCE

by Doug Goodwin

Like addicts, church boards sometimes have to hit rock bottom before they admit they have to change. For me and my little northern congregation it was when the board spent most of its meeting discussing the vacuum cleaner and its need for surprisingly controversial repair. For BC Conference of The United Church of Canada it was when much of our three day Annual Meeting was spent in intense arguments about how to reduce our operating budget by about 5%, only to refer it all back to the Executive. The Executive spent yet another two hour meeting arguing about the intricacies of wearing stoles at ordination services before it, too, surrendered and exclaimed, “There must be a better way!”

Following God among fellow sinners has never proved easy. Whether it was Moses delegating power to others, Samuel abandoning one king and anointing another, the disciples’ argument about who is the greatest, or the Council of Jerusalem approving Paul’s mission to the Gentiles with clear restrictions attached, some manner of “doing business”—articulating mission, making decisions, empowering others, and getting things done—was necessary.

Formed in 1925 by denominations whose very names signalled their commitment to “right” ecclesiastical practice (Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist), it is no surprise that The United Church of Canada has been obsessed with governance-related issues and especially with church structures, an obsession likely to continue in the present “Comprehensive Review” authorized by this past summer’s General Council meeting. In the United Church, it seems that growth in discipleship means serving on increasingly higher-level church committees.

The United Church is filled with different viewpoints, commitments and myths related to governance, resulting in a sometimes creative but usually confusing environment for making decisions. This article will, in a non-comprehensive way, take a look at some of those factors so that we might better understand our present governance morass. It will suggest that a good grasp of John Carver’s Policy Governance principles will greatly aid in sorting through the issues that face us and, perhaps, even

provide a framework for moving forward.¹

In the United Church most conversations and scholarly work about governance begin and end with the church's singular history of being formed from three denominations. Discussion about governance frequently is assumed to be exhausted when it is determined how much of each denomination's governance system was brought into the new union.

While offering helpful perspective, such a limited understanding of United Church governance leads to a dead end when trying to move forward. It makes little sense simply to try to rebalance denominational contributions ninety years after the fact, especially if that rebalancing does not deal with why the founders made the choices they did. What underlying principles and values behind the historic structures moved them into choosing one form of governance over another?

One might suppose that their choices were primarily political: who argued the best? who was the most stubborn or persuasive? who was willing to give up the most in order to achieve the shared vision of organic union? Moving forward, however, it is more helpful to consider some of the principles that consciously or unconsciously motivated the founders and provide insight today.

Conciliar Government

High among them was the concept of the conciliar church, governed by councils. Although primarily associated with the United Church's Reformed (Presbyterian and Congregational) heritage, the conciliar movement began in the medieval church in response to the Great Western Schism of 1378 to 1417. At heart it was an anti-papal, anti-monarchical movement, adopted by the upstart Protestants a century later. "Conciliar" meant that no individual could exercise supreme authority; even a pope, with all the power and authority of that office, would be required to make room for a general council in the organizational flow chart between him and God. Despite its popular meaning in many United Church circles, conciliar never meant that individuals could not exercise delegated authority. It did mean, however, that the power and authority of every

¹ The best place to start to investigate Policy Governance is at the Policy Governance website where several short articles provide an introduction and links are made to books and longer articles: <http://www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm>.

individual was restricted or bound by the higher authority of a council.

The concept of “conciliar” was also influenced by Enlightenment political concepts of federalism. Unlike an unrestrained monarchical system where all power comes from the top down, from a single head devolving to lower levels, federalism involves the division of basic powers among different groups. Not all levels share the same powers; in fact, most powers are not shared. While cooperation is expected, each governance level has its own constitutionally protected authority and power. Federalism is the norm of many countries, including nations following the Westminster parliamentary system and those following the congressional system.

This division of power and authority is seen clearly in the conciliar structure of the United Church. Each “court” of the church has its own unique authority and responsibility. Law—in the form of the Polity Section of the Basis of Union—is in place to ensure that “higher” courts cannot abrogate the authority of “lower” courts. Although it contains some features of a hierarchy (the appeal system, for instance), United Church polity is not hierarchical. In fact, especially where property is concerned, it could be argued that it is a reverse hierarchy, since congregational trustees have the most power, the Presbytery less (in its important “gate-keeper” role), with the Conference having power only in the situation of a congregation disbanding, and the General Council possessing no role regarding congregational property.

“Conciliar” today means two things in an ecclesial context: individual power is limited by the authorizing power of a council and church governance involves the division of powers among different levels of councils that nevertheless stay connected to one another.

Connexionalism

Methodism brought with it a more hierarchical sensibility (that made its admired bureaucracy so successful) and also a high value on “the connexion.”² When John Wesley’s modest reform movement within the Church of England grew far more quickly and dramatically than

² I prefer the old English spelling with an “x” although it is now commonly spelled “connection” as well, particularly in North America. The “x” reminds us that this is a concept with a history, with a depth of story and expectation that might be forgotten if spelled the same as the more common human value.

anticipated, the burgeoning group of “methodists” needed an organizational structure. At the heart of it was Wesley himself. All preachers were “connected” directly to him: he hand-wrote membership cards and claimed he knew each member by name; all property was in his name; he appointed preachers, established chapels, and set up societies. This highly centralized organization became known as “the Connexion.”

Centralization was considered crucial for mission and for maintaining discipline in doctrine and behaviour. This was viewed as an improvement over the practice of the Church of England in which parish priests often were isolated from one another, beholden more to the county squire who built the chapel and paid the priest’s stipend than to the larger church itself.

During Wesley’s lifetime the annual Conference was firmly established, bringing all ordained and lay preachers together for discussion, decision-making, and fellowship. While Wesley’s personal authority was unquestioned, the annual Conference established a collegiality among participants. Upon Wesley’s death, the Connexion was maintained through the annual Conference. Over time the “connexion” generated an adjective, “connexional,” describing an ethos of being closely related, primarily for mission.

At its best, the concept of “connexion” emphasizes that the local church is not alone; it is not the church without “The Church.” Christians work together not through contractual arrangements but because all are united for fellowship and accountability. Connexion is also for mission. God’s work is best carried out when people gather to “confer” and join their coordinated efforts to a common end.

The shadow side of connexionalism is the tendency to create hierarchical bureaucracies, to devalue the local church (treating congregations as “franchises”), and to blur the federation principle. As well, sometimes “being together” trumps mission, and self-care takes precedence over outreach.

In-built Resistance to Change

Two powerful fears fed by history and context helped underpin United Church decisions about governance. The first was the centuries-old fear of monarchy and concentrated power. “Power tends to corrupt” declared

Lord Acton, echoing what most already believed. In the West, power is dispersed (as in federalism); governments are often bicameral and judiciaries separated from legislatures. In the United Church, powers are widely distributed, individuals hold minimal power, and decisions often require the action of more than one level of governance.

Perhaps more surprising, the new church's structures also reflected a fear of quick change. The common lament that it is almost impossible to enact major change in the United Church is based on reality: the United Church was specifically structured to resist it. The underlying assumption was that the church was successful and growing, that it was now "the Christian Century," and that change, unless very carefully considered and universally accepted, was likely to be for the worse. Consensus was valued and uniformity in time-tested patterns was the norm. The Church's remit system, based on the Church of Scotland's Barrier Act, is only the most obvious mechanism to slow down change.

United Church governance also emerged strongly influenced by the modern conviction that it is next to impossible for groups to know "the truth" or "the good." Emphasis in governance was not in having a clear vision of the "right" outcomes, but in establishing fair systems where the unknown good might emerge on a case by case basis (known as "procedural justice"). It is a common source of frustration that *The Manual* of the Church is very explicit about how committees are to be fairly established, who can sit on them, and how business is to be conducted, but is very vague on what good those committees actually are to accomplish.

Management and Governance Boards

Understanding some of the other frustrations with United Church polity is clearer when the distinction between management boards and governing boards is known. The members of a management board make decisions and also carry out most of the work of the organization. A management board may create committees to add workers or increase efficiency, but it retains responsibility to execute its own decisions. All authority for action is lodged in the board and decisions are made only when its members are gathered together. The management board is often recognizable from its minutes because the best ones assign names to every "to do" item—to

ensure that the work decided upon will be carried out.

This management model works very well with small organizations with limited tasks and resources. However, it is used throughout the United Church without regard to the organization's size, from small congregations to the General Council Executive. Dysfunction emerges as the organization becomes more complex, committee structures emerge, and, particularly, when staff is hired. If the board still operates (consciously or unconsciously) as a management board, it will regard staff as "helpers" who assist the volunteer management group to do its job. Despite the fact that the United Church has over 250 full-time staff employed at General Council and Conference levels, staff are regarded conceptually as those aiding the volunteers, carrying out the directives of the volunteers between the few management meetings each year. Since there is no real place for proactive staff in a management board model, staff power is feared and curtailed, and, when it does happen to emerge (as one might hope with so many people employed), it is usually criticized.³

In contrast, governing boards are those that lead an organization by ensuring that it knows what its purpose is, that it is protected from unnecessary risk and is compliant with civil law; that it actually achieves its goals; and that it authorizes, and provides resources for, leaders with the skills, experience and knowledge to carry out its decisions and policies. While responsible for the whole organization and accountable to it, governing boards do not do the work of the whole organization. In fact, their job is limited but very powerful, like a governor on a machine or a rudder on a ship.

In a governing board model, staff members have a significant role as the ones who are empowered to achieve the purposes articulated by the governors. Governing boards tend to like decisive, innovative staff because such people can take the things the governors envision, but do not have the time, energy or skills to achieve, and make them happen.

³ A good test to determine whether a board should identify itself as a management board or a governing board is to ask: "Will the work we decide upon tonight be done by us and a few friends, or are we expecting it to be done by others?" If the answer is the former, the board is functioning as a management board. If it is the latter, the board needs to adopt the principles and practices of a governing board.

The literature on both corporate and non-profit governance is large and growing. Greatly influential, especially in the non-profit world, has been the model called “Policy Governance,” developed and promoted by John Carver and, more recently, by Carver in a team with his wife, Miriam. Part of the immediate attraction of Carver’s writing is his apparently clairvoyant ability to describe the very board with which his reader is frustrated. And, if he can describe the problems so accurately, perhaps he can also prescribe a good solution! Here is an example of Carver’s “clairvoyance” (and the reader can substitute the word “committees” for “staff” if that is more appropriate):

By and large, board members do not spend their time exploring, debating, and defining these dreams [of what their organization can accomplish in the world]. Instead, they expend their energy on a host of demonstratively less important, even trivial, items. Rather than having impassioned discussions about the changes they can produce in their world, board members are ordinarily found listening passively to staff reports or dealing with personnel procedures and the budget line for out-of-state travel. Committee agendas are likely to be filled with staff material masquerading as board work . . . Concern [of board members] is often expressed as complaints spent on trivial items, time spent reading reams of documents, meetings that run for hours and accomplish little, committees that are window dressing for what staff members want to do, meddling in administration, staff members who are more in control of board agendas than is the board, reactivity rather than proactivity, an executive committee’s becoming the *de facto* board, confusion about what is going on, a rubber-stamping of staff recommendations, and the lack of an incisive way to evaluate the executive.⁴

Carver is clear that Policy Governance is not about creating new governance structures; it is about working by new principles. Perhaps the key principle is the recognition of the difference between an organization’s purpose (Ends) and all its other issues (Means). The Policy

⁴ John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference*, Second Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1997), xiv.

Governance board is accountable for both Ends and Means, but it treats them differently. Ends are proactively articulated by the board. After carefully listening to its constituency (the “owners”), the board articulates Ends in written policies, transparently available for anyone to see. These policies answer such questions as: what good is the organization to accomplish? who are the beneficiaries? and at what cost (financial or otherwise)?

The board then instructs staff to accomplish these Ends and delegates authority (decision-making ability and resources) to do so. Unlike most United Church governance structures, however, the board does not tell the staff how to accomplish these tasks but allows the staff to operate freely and imaginatively, using the skills, experience and knowledge on the basis of which they were hired. Staff “Means” are clearly restricted, however, by a series of Limitation policies, ranging from directives as broad as “do not break the law” and “do not be unfair to employees” to much more detailed limitations. These are as detailed as the board wishes in order to give it confidence that the staff will function responsibly. Carver uses an ingenious but simple method of developing and writing such policies that allows a large amount of information to be captured in understandable and accessible policies.⁵

The performance of staff members is monitored and judged solely on the basis of written policies: are they achieving the Ends and are they in compliance with the Limitations policies? As a result, staff members do not have to try to mind-read the intentions of the board or peruse years of past meeting minutes. They are not victims of the personal opinions of individual board members; nor do they have to present proposal after rewritten proposal to a board that does not know (never mind able to articulate) its own expectations. Knowing what is to be achieved and what avoided provides the clarity that creates freedom and safety for staff to innovate and use their full abilities. Most management boards feel they need to tell staff what to do and how to do it. Policy Governance boards point to the goal, clearly demarcate the boundaries, and set staff free to

⁵ Carver uses a “mixing bowl” analogy where larger, broader policies hold progressively more detailed policies in the same subject area. Surprisingly, this is the only time that Dan Hotchkiss, in his helpful *Governance and Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), gives Carver credit, even though much that Hotchkiss promotes is clearly based on Policy Governance and Carver’s principles (with a handful of significant differences).

work. Policy governance boards do not instruct, correct, assist or manage staff. They listen well to their constituents, articulate Ends carefully, delegate decisively and monitor rigorously.

Important in the Policy Governance model is the principle of One Voice. Boards exercise power only as boards, not as individual board members, nor as board committees or sub-committees. Staff are instructed by the board speaking as a whole, not by the chair, the treasurer, or (as is common in the United Church) a sub-committee of the board. Staff members receive their instructions and are monitored and judged only by the board. Those instructions are typically given to a single lead staff person (whom Carver calls a CEO, although he is also clear the actual name does not matter). The flow of authority, then, begins with the ownership and is given to the board. Authority is then delegated to the CEO to accomplish certain things (Ends) while avoiding others (Limitations). In larger organizations the CEO would then do things like hire staff, establish contracts and set up management committees to get the work done. In smaller organizations the CEO would organize and oversee volunteers and volunteer committees. At all times the board deals with the rest of the organization only through the CEO and the CEO is directly accountable only to the board.

Policy Governance in the United Church

The Policy Governance model is used in a large number of corporations and organizations, particularly in North America. In The United Church of Canada it has been used by BC Conference since 2000 and by Toronto Conference since 2009. It is viewed with suspicion by some in the Church for several reasons: it is complicated and requires a fair degree of discipline; it is a departure from common practice and needs to be learned; it has been tried in some organizations and failed (although this failure may be the result of faulty implementation); and it is a model associated with a single individual (Carver) who is lionized in corporate circles. The most substantial difficulty voiced in the church with Policy Governance is that it creates a position of singular power in the CEO. This flies in the face of Protestant history where individual power (as described above) is feared. Some worry that it is not “conciliar,” giving an individual leader decision-making authority unchecked by conciliar or

collegial relationships. To be sure, the Policy Governance model can be sloppily instituted, without proper limitations and without rigorous monitoring, and can result (and has resulted) in CEOs wielding inappropriate power.

However, if the understanding of “conciliar” above is accurate, namely that it is the principle that individual power is “bound” or restricted by the ultimate authority of councils, then Policy Governance fits well into a conciliar system. Boards are accountable for the work of the whole organization. In order to get the work done, they may delegate some of their authority; the degree or extent of that delegation is up to the board. Individuals who have authority delegated to them are directed by the Ends articulated by the board, restricted by clear Limitations; their performance is assessed accordingly. The church actually can empower individual leaders to get things done and celebrate their work without fear, because it also has the ability to increase or restrict that power as needed.

The model may also be seen to embrace Methodist “connexionalism.” The gathering of the church for “connexion”—for determining mission, enhancing identity, taking counsel with one another and celebrating the good gifts of God—is exactly the kind of gathering of “owners” from which the board can discern appropriate Ends and clarify the values that shape the limitations. While Policy Governance seems well suited for General Council Executive and Conference-level governance, and, with slight modification, for boards of larger congregations, its principles could be applied more broadly.

The United Church resists the idea of the minister being the CEO of a congregation but who better to be the person accountable to “execute,” to get things done? Ministers with poor administrative skills can delegate authority to others. Those who might act in power-mongering ways can be restrained through clear Limitation policies. Unlike some Policy Governance boards, the minister would also be a governor, sitting as a Board member, ensuring the voice of the wider church (one of the “owners”) is heard and considered. One of the primary benefits of this would be a structure where the chief role of lay leaders would be as governance board members, as those determining the mission and direction of the congregation, not as administrators, building maintenance

crews and coordinators of volunteers.

This model sheds light on much of the malaise in the United Church's present governance practice: the discomfort of church councils with their staff; the confusion created by the "permanent committees" of the General Council Executive that combine governance, staff-selected means, beneficiary complaints and "owner" opinions in an undifferentiated mix; the inability of most governing bodies to reach decisions about the purpose for which their organization exists beyond vague "mission statements"; and the frustration that most boards express about not getting around to doing the "really important" work they sense they are called to undertake.

One would have a hard time ever calling the United Church conservative or reactionary, but in the area of governance those terms might well apply. The United Church loves its structures and will do much to maintain them, despite ongoing frustrations with them. Moving forward, the church can better understand the many traditions, fears and contexts that manifest themselves in our present governance practices. With understanding comes the ability to critique and, perhaps, even improve. Christ's church deserves at least that.

FROM THE HEART—ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER **by Foster Freed**

Sometime late in the afternoon of September 20th, 1980, I found myself, along with a large group of fellow worshippers, discharging onto Amsterdam Avenue in mid-town Manhattan, having participated throughout much of that day in traditional liturgies for the solemn Jewish observance of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. As we left the confines of Lincoln Square Synagogue, a seeker-friendly Orthodox synagogue created long before the recent trend of “seeker-friendly” worship, I was thoroughly fatigued and (given that Yom Kippur is a fast day) ravenously hungry, sensations I no doubt shared with many of my fellow worshippers. However, I was also becoming aware of a far deeper malaise—a gnawing emptiness, a spiritual exhaustion that would only grow larger over the next few days. Was this the end of the road, I found myself asking, of the spiritual “quest” in which I had been engaged for the better part of the past decade? Was it time to put aside all of the “big-ticket” questions with which I had been feverishly wrestling over the last decade?

In the Beginning—Curiosity

The quest had started shortly after my 20th birthday, when I summoned the courage to lay my hands on a copy of the New Testament. In truth, I had been harbouring considerable curiosity about the New Testament for many years. I can remember, as a very young child, fingering a waiting-room copy of the Bible in my dentist’s office and being told by my father—when I began to peruse the first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel—that I was into the section of the Bible that “we” don’t read. I also recall conversations with a second-grade friend who was Catholic, the two of us sharing our rudimentary understanding of the very different faiths in which we were being raised. That night, when I mentioned that conversation to my mom, she encouraged me to be—shall we say—a trifle more circumspect when speaking to Robert. The following year his mom yanked him out of public school and moved him into the parochial school system, thereby expressing, I suspect, her essential agreement with my mom’s point-of-view. Most tellingly, I can recall a pre-teen

conversation with my cousin Jack in which he put forth the opinion that he could never be a Christian since he found the whole notion of a human person worshipped as God to be deeply repugnant. To this day, the prescience of my response (in light of my future path) continues to astonish. “If God loves us as much as we claim God loves us,” began my retort, “why wouldn’t God become a human being in order to experience our lives from the inside?”

Despite those early indications that the New Testament and the Christian faith it embodies were going to play a key role in my journey, it took a number of years before I actually picked one up and began to read. Notwithstanding my natural inclination to be something of a rebel, and despite the fact that the Reform Judaism of my youth most certainly did encourage inter-faith awareness, the New Testament managed to retain its aura as an “off-limits” book. The excuse I needed came in the form of the one United Church of Canada minister who was most influential at that stage of my journey, namely Northrop Frye. As someone who had struggled through large chunks of the *Anatomy of Criticism*, I could not help but be impressed by Frye’s insistence that the Western canon could only be appreciated by those with *both* Testaments. With that, I was off to the races, quickly completing the journey from Matthew to Revelation. In the process, I found myself, a thoroughly secular child of the sixties, deeply impressed with the “man” Jesus, and far less taken by the religious trappings in which the New Testament had seemingly imprisoned him, but also resolving, were need ever to arise, to return to its pages as a valid starting place for spiritual succour.

In retrospect, it is not at all surprising that such a need arose some five years later. A combination of vocational uncertainty (having attained an undergraduate degree from York University’s Theatre department, the realization that I no longer especially enjoyed theatre was beginning to sink in) and a failed first marriage left me with the gnawing sense that I was, in fact, facing a crisis which included an important spiritual dimension. Recalling my previous resolve to turn to the New Testament in such a circumstance, I now found I was resisting that prospect. Having cast the secular sixties to one side by reading widely in a variety of Eastern religious traditions, and taking part in yoga classes and Hindu spiritual retreats, I came to sense that such pursuits were a convenient

way of postponing the one encounter to which I was truly called and yet, strangely enough, one I truly dreaded. In the end I did, once again, read my way through the New Testament and through a wide range of other Christian literature. In effect, and without quite realizing what I was doing, I was reading my way into the church.

By the fall of 1977, having dropped out of a Master's programme at the University of Toronto's Drama Centre in order to find menial work so I could spend most of my spare time reading and pondering, my quest was in high gear. The following summer, having spent one month working my way through *The Brothers Karamazov* (the uncommitted life is not worth living!) and the very next month coursing my way through Hans Kung's *On Being a Christian*, it was finally dawning on me, for better or worse, that the church was beckoning. But which communion? Throwing caution to the wind during the fall of 1978, I found myself involved in my own idiosyncratic version of church shopping.

Knowing next to nothing about the wide array of Protestant options and having recently read Timothy Ware's book on *Orthodoxy*, I made a Syrian Orthodox Church in downtown Toronto my starting point. Determining, on the basis of one Sunday, that this was more of a leap than I was prepared to handle, I began attending Catholic parish worship, feeling more at ease, though not quite yet more at home. Ironically, it was at a yoga meditation sitting, where I became acquainted with the philosopher Don Evans (another United Church minister!), that I was handed the decisive recommendation that has pretty much shaped my life for over 30 years. While Professor Evans struggled to fathom why I needed anything beyond the yoga sittings in which he and I were both participants, he finally offered a suggestion to the effect that, if I really did need to find a church, Bloor Street United was probably the one I ought to be visiting. In particular, he ventured that I would find the preaching of one Clifford Elliott especially helpful.

Searching for Roots

That turned out to be an understatement. From the distance of over 30 years, it is not easy to fathom all of the factors that made the "fit" at Bloor Street seem so right. No doubt the fact that mainline Protestant worship patterns are not entirely dissimilar to the Reform Judaism of my youth

played a role; no doubt Cliff's winsome blend of serious biblical engagement and prairie social activism also played its part. In the end, Bloor Street became my church-home until a job transfer in the spring of 1979 took me from Toronto. It was a good beginning, but one that, courtesy of Cliff, left me with some nagging questions, and one especially troubling question. Having made it clear (on the one hand) that he did not think it *necessary* for me to "convert" to Christianity, but (on the other hand) observing that I should bring my "Jewish roots" with me in the event that I did become a Christian, Cliff thereby helped to define the agenda to which I had to attend. Twelve months in Vancouver followed, months which included a largely failed quest for that city's equivalent of Bloor Street United, but which also included a great deal of reading focussed on an elusive search for the Jewish roots of which Cliff had spoken. Having grown up in the liberal traditions of Reform Judaism, I quickly discovered that I was far more drawn to the stronger tobacco found in conservative and Orthodox-leaning writers such as Martin Buber and Abraham Heschel.

No doubt that was a key factor the following summer when, having returned to New York City for an extended "visit" with my parents, I found myself not only enrolled in an introductory Judaism course at the New School, but also attending weekly Sabbath worship at Lincoln Square, a liberal Orthodox Synagogue. I had, at the time, become familiar with the figure of Franz Rosenzweig, one of the outstanding Jewish theologian/philosophers of the 20th century. Although my attempts at getting through Rosenzweig's masterwork, *The Star of Redemption*, had been less than a sterling success, I was more than a little familiar with Rosenzweig's story and aware of the parallels between my situation and the one he faced as a young man. Having grown up in a "minimally observant" Jewish home, and having seen his close friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy convert to Christianity, Rosenzweig himself was on the verge of becoming a Christian. He was determined, however, to enter the Christian faith as he imagined the first disciples entered it: fully immersed in Judaism. It was during this period, as he explored the world of Jewish Orthodoxy, that Rosenzweig, in the midst of a Yom Kippur service, was graced with a mystical experience that convinced him to remain within Judaism. There is no way for me to pretend that the

expectations I brought to that Yom Kippur service were not heightened as I pondered Rosenzweig's experience and wondered whether lightning might not, just possibly, strike again in much the same way. The fact that I knew, even at the time, that this was a rather self-regarding exercise did not diminish the sense of disappointment and spiritual exhaustion I felt when that Yom Kippur service drew to a close in late September, 1980.

At the time I really did toy with the possibility that I might simply throw in the towel and give up the whole spiritual journey on which I had been engaged. During the final week of September, the process on which I had embarked ten years earlier appeared to have led me to a dead-end. It was, ironically, an ad in *The New York Times* that caught my eye and opened a door I had closed (though without quite locking it) during my New York explorations of Judaism. That door took the form of a notice advertising a service marking the 50th anniversary of Riverside Church. While I had never been inside Riverside, I was certainly familiar with the building and with its legacy as one of the "cathedrals" of North American liberal Protestantism. I was also familiar with the name of its senior minister, William Sloane Coffin, who, when Chaplain of Yale University, had become a nationally recognized figure in the Vietnam protests of the sixties and seventies. No doubt his name, as much as curiosity about Riverside, drew me to that October 5th celebration.

Home-coming

My experience of that service of worship was of a piece with my first Sunday at Bloor Street United, a Sunday—interestingly—on which Cliff Elliott was missing-in-action, leaving David Allan to preach a marvellous sermon. Bill Coffin's sermon at Riverside's 50th anniversary service was every bit as impressive. The intriguing thing, however, is that the most significant impact of these services happened long before either preacher had entered the pulpit. In each instance it was the opening hymn, expertly played and passionately sung by large, committed congregations. In each case, the emotional and spiritual impact of that shared-act of hymn singing was overwhelming. In my 62 years on this planet, on only a small handful of occasions, I have found myself in an unfamiliar setting, only to be filled—almost instantly—with a strong sense of being "at-home." It had happened on my first Sunday at Bloor Street; once again, now at

Riverside, I was flooded with a sense of being in-place, a place that was, at least for a time, to be “my” place. While perhaps not a “mystical” experience of the Rosenzweig sort, my experience that morning was one that I was not prepared to ignore. The following Sunday, having returned to Riverside, I found myself taking the elevator to the 10th floor of the Riverside tower in order to indicate my interest in joining the church through baptism. I was assigned to a membership class (at the time, Riverside was adding between 20 and 30 new members a month!) and was given a date: December 14, 1980, was established as the date of my official entry into full participation in the life of the church.

The next two months went by in a blur. I generally think of myself—and am generally regarded—as a reasonably articulate person. During the stretch of time between my expression of interest in being baptized, and the day of my baptism, I could not think a straight thought, and most certainly would not have been capable of expressing a clear idea even if my life depended upon said expression! To this day, when asked whether I “believe” in the actuality of the demonic, I always point to that six-week experience of inner confusion as my mercifully brief glimpse of trans-human forces that have chosen, inexplicably, to work against God’s good purposes. I am thankful that this period lasted only through those tempestuous six weeks, ending definitively with my baptism, a fact which may explain why, when push comes to shove, I am constitutionally incapable of saying no to a baptism.

As for the baptism itself, I found myself facing something of a choice. Riverside Church boasts a dual denominational affiliation: with The United Church of Christ (rooted in North American Congregationalism) and also with the liberal American Baptist Convention. Those entering Riverside through adult baptism were able to choose whether to be fully immersed in Riverside’s “dunk” tank, or whether to be sprinkled in typical mainline Protestant fashion. Without much hesitation, I chose the latter despite the clear “historical” attraction to the sort of full immersion that Jesus (Jesus the Jew!) would have experienced at the hands of the Baptist. My motives here were mixed. Having already experienced eighteen months of life in the mainline Protestant world of The United Church of Canada, I was, perhaps, already “imprinted” by that form of baptism. I also was not enamoured of the

aesthetics of the dunk-tank method, i.e., falling backwards into what appeared to be an only slightly enlarged bath-tub. (Had Riverside offered “river” side baptisms, no doubt I would have opted for that in a heartbeat, even in the polluted waters of the Hudson River!) Perhaps the most telling reason, however, has to do with the fact that one of the associate ministers presided over the dunk-tank while Coffin did the sprinkling. Yet the sermon that he preached on the day of my baptism included a mischievous reference to the fact that *he*, were *he* being baptized as an adult, would most certainly choose full immersion! Yes, I confess: I wanted to be baptized by William Sloane Coffin.

Coffin!

What can I say about my brief acquaintance with Coffin and his larger-than-life persona? Theologically, it would have been difficult to wedge a dime between Coffin’s stance and that of Cliff Elliott. Yet, in terms of their personal comportment, there was a world of difference between someone I would describe as a country gentleman and someone with a “Peck’s bad boy” quality, a pugnacious, street-wise city kid who retained some of the feistiness that must have characterized his time in the CIA! It may, indeed, have been that seemingly discordant facet of Coffin’s past—perhaps coupled with the celebrity status he acquired during his controversial time as Yale Chaplain—that explains the “mask” with which he seemed to protect himself at Riverside. Even during the Lenten study led by Coffin, I found it hard to escape the sense that Coffin was performing for us. How very different my memory is of the one study group I attended with Cliff, in which his own personal vulnerability was always visible, though, of course, not in a showy, ostentatious way. Nevertheless, what made the sermons of these two remarkable human beings so deeply impressive was their willingness to permit their very different personalities to factor into their preaching.

I need not wonder at the extent to which Coffin’s preaching cemented my decision, after a nearly decade long pilgrimage, to “face the music” and formally become part of the Christian movement. The sermon he preached on my first Riverside Sunday, as part of the congregation’s 50th anniversary celebration, picked up themes that had become important to me, both from the reading I had been doing, and also from my time at

Bloor Street and other United Churches.¹ Although I was no longer a person of the “hard” left (my neo-Marxist faith died quite conclusively with the revelations that had poured out of Pol Pot’s Cambodia), I remained deeply sympathetic to the social justice challenge with which Bill Coffin charged the congregation on that celebratory Sunday. Perhaps making more of an impact, however, was his non-negotiable insistence that the “life of the mind” needed to play a significant role within the “life of faith.” Taking the second chapter of Philippians as his text, and having played for us a brief recording of one of the prayers of Harry Emerson Fosdick,² Coffin insisted that “every great preacher from Paul to Fosdick has tried to engage the hearts and to inform the minds of their hearers. They have tried to link love with learning, piety with intellect, aware that aroused Christians, but uninformed, are as dangerous as quack physicians.” Then he proceeded to issue the following challenge to his fellow preachers:

I want to urge the prime time preachers, the evangelists of the so-called electronic church, the leaders of the so-called moral-majority, to work out their salvation with just a little more fear and trembling. I agree with them that the Bible contains all the answers, at least all of the significant ones. But I would insist that no one understands the Bible until he or she has seen and lived at least part of its contents. Like any book, the Bible is something of a mirror. If an ass peers in, you can’t expect an apostle to peer out. So preachers should be students of the world as well as preachers of the Word, explorers first before they take upon themselves to challenge their people.

Re-hearing those words more than thirty years later, I have no trouble comprehending why it is that I joined myself to the church through Riverside and the liberal Protestant tradition for which it continues to stand. But why, at the end of the day, was I prompted to join the church at all?

¹ One of the joys of preparing this sketch of my spiritual journey was stumbling across a website that Coffin’s son, David, is currently devoting to collecting recordings of his father’s sermons: williamsloanecoffin.org.

² Fosdick was Riverside’s founding pastor.

God Incarnate

I trust that most of my readers will be aware that the life of the mind plays no small role in traditional Judaism. If a vibrant faith community, steeped in a rich and rigorous intellectual tradition was the only thing I was looking for, surely there was no need for me to cross into Christian terrain. Happily, the sermon Coffin preached on December 14th, 1980, the day of my baptism, pinpoints with almost uncanny precision just what it was that I had been looking for in my rather strange journey. It was, for many of us, a deeply emotional Sunday: just a week earlier, John Lennon had been gunned down only a couple of miles from Riverside, and a sense of the vulnerabilities and uncertainties of human life hung in the air.

Taking as his text Isaiah's promise—"unto us a child is born"—the sermon also referenced a member of the Riverside congregation who had just written to Coffin, asking that he might one day preach a sermon on Abraham, and the courageous decision Abraham made when he left his homeland on the basis of a mere promise. Coffin's response was to suggest that there was no need to wait for such a sermon. Why? Because, "when you stop and think about it, the risk Abraham took in going out into the world, the Lord God took, and more, coming into the world." From there, Coffin constructed (perhaps inspired by Kierkegaard?) a wonderfully imaginative dialogue in which the angels attempt to convince God, given the unworthiness of the human race, that the sending of a "child" is a bad idea. God's response to the angels is priceless:

It is true that they are diseased through their disloyalty. Still I cannot part with them; I cannot give them up. So what, dear angels, would you have me do? Offer more laws? More creeds? That these are important I will not dispute, but as important as they are they are not compelling . . . Only love from heaven made incarnate on earth can make a human being grow. So my mind is made up. No longer shall we say to them "Seek ye the way." The Way itself shall come to them and say: "Arise and walk."

I find it impossible not to be struck by the way in which Bill Coffin—much like Cliff Elliott—managed to ground a progressive vision for the church upon a theological foundation deeply steeped in the Christian tradition.

When asked about the journey that brought me to the church, I will often say that I began it as a “Lenten” Christian (one eager to follow the “earthly” Jesus even through the wilderness), eventually becoming an “Easter” Christian (one who had caught a glimpse of the Jesus who still lives), and then later still, a “Pentecost” Christian (one moved by the Spirit to become a participant in the Christian faith community). Typically, I will then add that only late in the day—only at the end of that process—did I become a “Christmas” Christian: one who had come to recognize the sending of Jesus, the incarnate One, as part of God’s plan from the beginning.

Recalling the childhood conversation with my cousin Jack—the one in which I spoke of the Incarnation as a “logical” extension of God’s love—I may well have to revise this narrative in order to underscore that it was my yearning to be a “Christmas” Christian that drove the process from the outset! A Christmas Christian: one who sees in the face of the Christ Child the still-point of a turning world and senses the holy presence of the very God who created this world in the beginning, the very God who will not rest until creation and all of its children have been safely restored to the goodness that is their birthright. For the privilege of having found myself, quite unexpectedly, playing a small walk-on role in such a wondrously extravagant drama, what else is there for me to do but give thanks? As I do!

PROFILE

PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION: WILLIAM SCOTT'S MINISTRY IN KOREA

by Hyuk Cho



The United Church of Canada (UCC)'s mission partner in Korea, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2013. It would be hard to imagine the history of the PROK without the contribution of Canadian missionary William Scott (1886-1979) to its birth. Scott was a close companion to the Rev. Dr. Chai-choon Kim, who was the father-in-law of former United Church of Canada Moderator, the Very Rev. Sang Chul Lee, one of the founders of the PROK. Kim and Scott were excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) at its General Assembly in 1952 because they taught and supported Higher Biblical Criticism at the seminary. In this article I wish to honour Scott's theology and practice of partnership in mission, and show how they made a vital contribution to the origin and work of the PROK.

Biographical Sketch¹

William Scott was born in Lanark, Scotland in November, 1886, about 40 km southeast of Glasgow. At the age of eighteen he became active in religious work through the YMCA and in evangelical work through the local town mission. Early in 1906 Scott responded to the call of Alexander McMillan when he visited Scotland to recruit candidates for the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Having passed a cursory test, Scott came to Canada for further study in order to become a minister. He was sent directly to a mission field in Manitoba, where, during the winter months, he attended Brandon College to complete his matriculation. In the fall of the next year he entered Queen's University and graduated in 1911 with an Honours B.A. in English. There he met his future wife,

* This article has benefited from comments by Marion Pope.

¹ United Church of Canada Archives, Biography File, William Scott, "Notes on Life History of Rev. William Scott" (1937). The author thanks Ron Scott (grandson) for additional information on William Scott's life in Korea.

Katie Edith McKee. After graduation from Queen's, Scott spent a year on the Illecillewaet Mission field in British Columbia.² From there he proceeded to advanced studies at Westminster Hall of the Presbyterian Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia.³ After his graduation in 1914, William and Katie were married at Point Grey, Vancouver, and then embarked for Korea, where they lived and worked for a total of 38 years.⁴ As a consequence of the hostilities during World War II, Scott and his fellow missionaries were forced to leave Korea in 1942 for Japan. They sailed on to Madagascar, in the Portuguese East African colony of Mozambique, where an exchange for Japanese nationals took place. On arriving back in Canada in 1942, Scott served the three-point charge of Burford, Scotland and Bethel United Churches near Brantford, ON. In 1943 he was honoured by Union College, Vancouver, with the degree of Doctor of Divinity. After the war, the Scotts were able to return to Korea where they continued to work until 1956, when Scott turned 70.

Turning Point

As Scott approached the end of his theological education at Westminster Hall in 1914, he must have wondered what shape his future ministry would take. During this time of discernment, he witnessed a shocking incident. On May 23, 1914, a Japanese ship, the *Komagata Maru*, carrying 376 passengers—340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus, all British subjects—arrived in the Vancouver harbour. The passengers were refused entry to Canada on the grounds that they had violated the “continuous journey regulation” of 1908. They languished in the harbour for two months, suffering from a lack of water and food, and were forced

² The Illecillewaet Mission was established in 1898 by the Presbyterian Church. It embraced a wide area, including points at various times at Albert Canyon, Bear Creek, Cambie, Glacier, Illecillewaet, Malakwa, Rogers Pass, Sicamous, Taft and Three Valley. After union in 1925 the field was called the Malakwa Mission Field. Since 1977, the former Illecillewaet Mission has been constituted as the Sicamous-Malakwa Pastoral Charge in Kamloops-Okanagan Presbytery of British Columbia Conference. The United Church of Canada British Columbia Conference Archives, Illecillewaet Mission Fonds. <http://memorybc.ca/illecillewaet-mission-fonds;rad>.

³ Following church union in 1925, Westminster Hall merged with Ryerson College of the Methodist Church to form the United Church's Union College. In 1971 Union College and the Anglican Theological College joined to form the Vancouver School of Theology.

⁴ Katie was kept busy as the mother of four boys— all born in Korea during the years 1915-1924.

to return to India. This incident was brought to the attention of the public in 2004 by the Canadian film, *Continuous Journey*, directed by Ali Kazimi.⁵ In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the incident.

Scott said there were two reasons that he and Katie chose the missionary life. One was a compelling conversation with Duncan MacLeod, a missionary to Formosa (Taiwan), about the importance of foreign missions. The other was

our deep concern over a boatload of Indian coolies, bound for lumber camps in British Columbia, but refused landing privileges in Vancouver because their ship had not come direct from the port of embarkation. They remained cooped up on board ship for several weeks in [that] uncomfortable and unsanitary situation.⁶

While the passengers were forced to stay on the boat, the scurrilous song, “White Canada Forever,” was gaining popularity:

This is the voice of the West and it speaks to the world:

The rights that our fathers have given

We’ll hold by right and maintain by might,

Till the foe is backward driven.

We welcome as brothers all white men still,

But the shifty yellow race,

Whose word is vain, who oppress the weak,

Must find another place.

Chorus:

Then let us stand united all

And show our fathers’ might,

That won the home we call our own,

For white man’s land we fight.

To oriental grasp and greed

We’ll surrender, no never.

Our watchword be “God save the King”

White Canada forever.⁷

⁵ Ali Kazimi, *Continuous Journey*, 87 min., Peripheral Visions Film & Videos Inc., 2004, DVD.

⁶ William Scott, *Canadians in Korea: Brief Historical Sketch of Canadian Mission Work in Korea* (Toronto: Board of World Missions, United Church of Canada, 1975), 232.

⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II: 1839-1964 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 168-9.

In this context, Principal Mackay of Westminster Hall challenged the Canadian government to formulate an immigration law to be applied to all would-be immigrants equally, and he recommended a “racial congress” to assist politicians to better understand the diversity of the cultures of those coming to Canada.⁸

It was natural for Scott to follow his teacher’s conviction. Previously, he had written that when he saw Japanese, Chinese and East Indian people on the streets of Vancouver, the thought kept rising in his mind: “There goes a man, like me, who needs the Saviour’s grace. His people, like my people, must hear the Saviour’s voice.”⁹ Scott already had compassion and passion for Asian people when the *Komagata Maru* incident fired his resolve to work with them as a missionary.

“The Higher Criticism”

Scott’s first choice for missionary service had been India, but, since there was no opening in that country, the Foreign Mission Board suggested Korea. The Scotts agreed and arrived on December 3, 1914. The next day Scott met fellow Canadian missionary L.L.Young.¹⁰ Young mentioned that he was teaching the Book of Job in the local Bible Institute. As their conversation continued, Scott realized that Young was teaching Job, including all the circumstances of the story, as historical fact. Scott thought differently and told Young that when he had studied Job in his final year of theology, he “had found it a sublime, imaginative, poetic treatment of the problem of suffering.” Scott records Young as responding, “Poetic, nothing!”¹¹

From the very beginning of his mission, Scott was confronted with the issue of Higher Criticism. Although he had been living in Korea for less than two years, he expressed his concern about this in a letter to the Board of Foreign Mission:

It is a remarkable thing that, despite the fact that all our

⁸ John Mackay, “Problems of Immigration, VII: Komagata Maru,” *Westminster Hall Magazine and Farthest West Review*. Vol. 5, No 6 (July 1914), Special Collections [JV 7225.E53 #34], University of Saskatchewan, 8-9.

⁹ Scott, “Notes on Life History of Rev. William Scott,” 1.

¹⁰ After Church Union in 1925, Young left the United Church and in 1927 he went to work for the Presbyterian Church in Canada’s Korean mission in Japan.

¹¹ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 206.

Canadian colleges, authorized by our church, accept the main points of modern interpretation, our Korea Mission has consistently held to the old, and boasted of its freedom from “Higher Criticism.” God gives us wisdom in introducing a difficult yet necessary subject.¹²

Scott determined that introducing Higher Criticism was a necessity, though it was to become a controversial and divisive issue in the Korean churches. Scott knew of the conservative theological teaching of Princeton Seminary’s Charles A. Hodge and its theological inheritance through J. Gresham Machen, and of the subsequent influence of their disciples in Korea.¹³ Scott became deeply concerned about the damage done by the conservative theology of the American missionaries to the Korean church: “Almost all the missionaries sent to Korea by the American Presbyterian churches were men who strongly supported the ultra-conservative side in the [higher criticism] controversy.”¹⁴

So it was that Scott welcomed the decision to establish the Chosun Theological Seminary¹⁵ in Seoul in 1939 because of the seminary’s progressive approach, which included critical study of the Scriptures. But before the seminary could be fully set up, the Scotts had to return to Canada because of the war in the Pacific. When they returned to Korea in 1947, he was appointed Professor of Old Testament at the Chosun Seminary. Scott soon found that his friend and colleague there, Chai-choon Kim, was charged with heretical teaching. Kim, one of the key founding members of the seminary, was teaching a scholarly understanding of the Bible and biblical criticism.¹⁶ Finding Kim in difficulties, Scott made a plea to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea for greater tolerance, pointing out that the

¹² United Church of Canada Archives, Presbyterian Church in Canada Board of Foreign Mission Fonds 122, Box 3 File 34, Scott to Armstrong, 1 April 1916.

¹³ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 205.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

¹⁵ The name was changed to Hankuk Theological Seminary in 1951. It became Hanshin University in 1980.

¹⁶ Chai-choon Kim was studying Old Testament at Princeton Seminary of New Jersey in 1928. He realized Princeton was very conservative; so he transferred to Western Seminary of Pittsburgh (1929-1932). Kim taught at Chosun and Hankuk Theological Seminaries from 1939 to 1965. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Union College at the University of British Columbia in 1958.

PCK doctrinal articles used the word “infallible” only in relation to “faith and conduct.” He insisted that all reputable seminaries in the Christian world followed the method of study now being taught by the Hankuk Theological Seminary. These statements immediately branded him as heretical and led to his inclusion in the 1952 condemnation by the General Assembly, a meeting held while the Korean War raged.¹⁷ Hankuk Seminary lost its accreditation as a theological school of the PCK, and Kim and Scott were expelled from the PCK.

Formation of the PROK

Neither Kim nor Scott submitted to the decision and action of the General Assembly. Furthermore, other ministers and lay leaders who supported their teaching joined them in rejecting the discipline of the Church. On June 10, 1953, the dissenting ministers and supportive laity met in the auditorium of the Hankuk Theological Seminary and held the 38th General Assembly in Defence of the Constitution. This marks the birth of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea.

After the schism, the Executive of the General Council of the UCC recommended that “our mission be associated with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea . . . to take effect on July 1, 1955.”¹⁸ In the letter to the Korea Mission and the two General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Churches in Korea, the UCC expressed “its profound regret that the Presbyterian Church in Korea has divided on matters concerning the interpretation of Christian doctrine,” and announced its decision to “continue its long standing work in Korea through association with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, and co-operative agencies and organizations.”¹⁹

Scott worked hard to secure support from the UCC for the PROK, and, without UCC support, the new denomination would have faced difficulties with regard not only to mission partnership but also to financial stability. Even though he retired in 1956 at the age of 70, upon his return to Canada he continued to work on behalf of liberal Korean causes and especially the educational ministries of the PROK. In addition

¹⁷ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216-7.

to its moral and spiritual support, the United Church gave a grant for the erection of a new seminary campus in Seoul.²⁰ Due to the Kim and Scott legacy, Hankuk Theological Seminary (now Hanshin University) was so active in the struggle for justice and the unification of Korea during the military dictatorships of the 1960s to the 1990s that many faculty members and students were imprisoned. The seminary led the way in bringing the critical study of Scripture, Minjung theology, progressive Christian thinking and the social gospel to Korea.

Intercultural Ministry

Scott begins and ends his book, *Canadians in Korea*, with a poem by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore:

O Korea, who, in Asia's golden age
 Was one of Asia's lighted lamps,
 Let but your lamp once more be lit
 And you will be a shining light
 To all the East.²¹

Scott uses the poem to represent his understanding of Korean history and of his own role in Korea. Scott divides the poem into three chronological segments: “(1) an appreciation of Korea’s rich cultural past—she was a lighted lamp; (2) an understanding of her more recent predicament—her light had failed; and (3) a hopefulness regarding her future—a faith that what once was great may yet again be great.”²² Scott affirms the role of Korean religions such as Shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism as giving shape to Korean culture. He expresses his concern for the political situation under Japanese colonialism and his expectations for the future. In his analysis we see that Scott’s main concern is how Korea may regain a faith for the present and future. There is no attempt to judge Korean culture negatively, but rather an affirmation that Christian faith would serve in the revival of Korea’s light.

As a Christian missionary, Scott did not accept that the purpose of the Christian mission was to condemn Korean culture and convert its

²⁰ The United Church gave a grant of \$100,000 in 1957 and the Overseas Mission Board (OMB) and the Women’s Missionary Society (WMS) contributed an additional \$55,000 in 1958.

²¹ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 1. The poem was originally published in Dong-A Ilbo (Daily Newspaper), 2 April 1929. In the end of his book Scott changes “your” in the third line to “thy.”

²² Ibid.

people by disconnecting them from their native culture. In 1926, when he was teaching Korean evangelists at a Hamheung worker's conference, he expressed his concern about the consequences of conservative theological thinking, especially as it affected one's understanding of Scripture and the relationship of Christianity to other religions. Scott introduced Higher Criticism and the comparative study of religions to his students. Once he challenged a Korean minister to "compare Confucius, Buddha and Jesus." The minister responded: "How can you compare a mosquito larva with a crane or a tiger with a mouse? Confucius and Buddha are simply not comparable with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. A sheep wants to eat only water and grass. What you are offering is food for pigs."²³ This interchange evidences how Korean ministers had been taught to understand Christianity and its relationship to other religions. Even though his teaching was opposed, Scott believed Korean ministers needed an understanding of the other religions in Korea so that Christianity could take root in Korean soil.

Ministry of Education

Scott dedicated his life to educational work in Korea. His contribution is seen in two major activities. First, he developed two schools, Eunjin Boy's High School and then Youngsaeng Higher Common School. Although it was uncommon in the mission schools of the day, it was a matter of principle for Scott to ensure that the curriculum reflect Korean government standards. His tireless work as a secondary school principal (1921-28) resulted in schools of high repute. In 1924 Scott established school boards with equal representation of Korean and mission members. From the beginning, the Canadian mission did not want to control the schools; rather they were determined to work with the Korean people,²⁴ encouraging them to take control of their own institutions.

Second, Scott sent several Korean students to post-graduate programmes in Canada. He said, "This was a venture not encouraged by other Presbyterian missions because of the fear that students going abroad might come under the influence of too advanced theological thinking."²⁵

²³ Yang-sun Kim, *History of the Korean Church in the Ten Years since Liberation, 1945-1955* (Seoul: Presbyterian Church in Korea, 1956), 186-7.

²⁴ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 100-1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

Such resistance to higher critical learning was certainly against the policy of the (three-self) Nevius Method.²⁶ Among these students were two later to become major leaders in theological and general education—Kwan-sik Kim (Knox College, 1922-4), who became the high school principal after Scott, and Nam-dong Suh (Emmanuel, 1955-56, and honorary doctorate, 1984), one of the pioneer developers of Minjung theology in the 1980s. Several other students who studied in Canada became professors at Hanshin University where progressive theologies were taught.²⁷

When Scott was living and working in Korea under the Japanese colonialism of the first half of the 20th century, he wrote, “One notable response of the church to the changing times and the adverse criticism of communism was the awakening and deepening of Christian concern for social and moral issues.”²⁸ He understood the church’s public role not as preaching about the after-life but as engaging with a variety of social concerns, including “temperance and moral welfare work, rescue homes for prostitutes, homes for beggar boys, work among factory hands, organization of YM and YWCAs and WCTUs, demand for a fairer wage system (even among mission employees).”²⁹ Along with his other educational ventures, Scott taught at night schools for illiterate women and for boys and girls too poor to attend day schools. His leadership in taking action for justice and peace, along with the healing work of the Canadian mission medical staff, provided an overall ministry of encouragement as the Korean people endured bitter suffering under Japanese colonialism.

Scott’s Legacy

Through the experiences of William Scott we recognize how important the issue of Higher Criticism became during the early 20th century and, interestingly, still is. Scott was deeply concerned about the influence of

²⁶ According to Charles Clark the method influenced “almost every section” of the “Presbyterian Northern Mission Rules and By-Laws of 1891.” The Rules and By-Laws became a foundation of American mission policy in Korea. The basic concept was the three-self formula: self-governance, self-propagation and self-support. Charles A. Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930), 75-82.

²⁷ These include David Jung (Emmanuel, 1947), Chung-choon Kim (Emmanuel, 1951) and Jang-sik Lee (Queen’s, 1954).

²⁸ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 117.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

American conservative theology on the development of theology and faith in Korea. He blamed conservative theology for “an almost worshipful attitude towards the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, unquestioned acceptance of a strictly traditional creed, and utter submission to the courts of the church.”³⁰ For Scott, this theology discouraged meaningful inter-faith dialogue in a richly diverse society and encouraged Christians to distinguish themselves as “saints” and to treat others as “sinners.” The controversy over Higher Criticism led to the cry of heresy in Korea from 1947 to 1953; Scott and the UCC supported the more progressive Korean Christians facing this crisis.

Pondering Scott’s courage in facing the charge of heresy, I have come to respect even more deeply the meaning of “partnership in mission,” a foundational principle of the mission policy of the United Church.³¹ Scott supported Chai-choon Kim and eagerly shared his burden of suffering for justice. He practised this principle of partnership in mission from the beginning of his ministry of education in Korea, setting up a policy of equal representation of Korean and missionary members in all institutions. This approach to their common task in the 1920s eventually led to total Korean leadership of the church that became the PROK. Scott’s ministry is a model of mutually respectful mission and of the United Church’s vision of an intercultural church.

³⁰ Ibid., 241-2.

³¹ The United Church of Canada, “Seeking to Understand ‘Partnership’ for God’s Mission Today,” in *Record of Proceedings of the General Council* (1988), 614-616.

BOOK REVIEWS

Glimpses of Grace: Reflections of a Prison Chaplain

Donald Stoesz. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2010. Pp. 172.

Donald Stoesz has been ministering as a Correctional Service of Canada prison chaplain for 24 years and is an ordained Mennonite pastor who completed a Ph.D. in religious studies at McGill University in 1991. His book, *Glimpses of Grace*, a collection of reflections on the personal, spiritual, theological and administrative challenges and opportunities of prison ministry in the Correctional Service of Canada, is an extremely valuable contemporary commentary and resource. I found it offered a very refreshing and inspiring walk down the memory lane of my own 16 years of ministry as a prison chaplain.

Glimpses of Grace begins with a brief but helpful introduction to the theological flow that Stoesz has developed in the context of his ministry, along with a definition of how he sees his role as a chaplain, as well as an introduction to the format of the following two parts of the book. In these two parts Don provides 121 “Glimpses of Grace” that arise from a ministry that has been transformative for both offenders and himself. Part One records direct ministry opportunities and Part Two includes 5 chapters focusing on theoretical and theological implications of prison chaplaincy.

Part One includes separate chapters on spiritual transformation, marriage and parenting, issues of authority, therapeutic models of chaplaincy, programming and the role of volunteers. Stoesz describes the theological approach of his ministry with offenders as justification, sanctification and judgement, a sequence that is out of step with conversion-focused approaches that begin with judgement. His theological rationale fits well with my experience as a prison chaplain and with gospel accounts of Jesus’ contacts with the marginalized. Moreover, it is a helpful challenge to many of the assumed theological approaches of my time of service in federal corrections as well as to those of the present.

Stoesz’s one-page reflections on the complex interpersonal challenges for the families of offenders are insightful. His reflections on authority make clear the need for the chaplain to establish and maintain healthy boundaries in relationships with offenders. He also names the

institutional challenges and stresses of walking the narrow line between staff and offenders. I found his use of story, particularly of fairy tales, a creative way to encourage pro-social growth in offenders. A highlight for me in Part One was the identification of a seven-step spiritual process that he visualizes as a modified labyrinth, portraying the flow of the seven steps spiralling in and then out. His optimism about God's life-giving movement in prison is rendered through the image of water finding its way by force of gravity, and is a strong testimony to the hopeful stance that grounds his ministry in a sometimes discouraging context.

Part Two explores the challenges of ecumenism, inter-faith relationships, restorative justice, ecclesiastical implications of chaplaincy and some concluding theological reflections. The reader is given a good introduction to the complex world of multi-faith relationships. Stoesz is candid about the stretching he experiences as a Christian who has the responsibility to facilitate the provision of a wide variety of religious care within the institution. Stir into these already complex dynamics the unrealistic expectations of some offenders and their mixed motives, and it is clear that the chaplain has much to juggle to fulfill his institutional responsibility.

Stoesz also recognizes his theological growth as a result of exposure to "Pentecostal Exuberance and Catholic Reverence." He is a proponent of restorative justice and provides a brief critique of current trends in federal corrections, including the imposition of longer sentences and the erosion of a more dynamic security model within the Correctional Service of Canada. Alongside the programs he has developed, he names others that he has found valuable. He expresses disagreement with evangelical programs that include baptism of offenders in prison and thereby ignore the importance of the initiation of offenders into Christian communities outside the walls. His reflections on the image of Abraham's identity in a foreign land (Genesis 23:4) in the concluding chapter left me thinking "resident alien" might be a useful way to name the chaplain's "place" within a prison.

As a clinical pastoral educator, I found Stoesz's emphasis on the authority of the living human document, through the inclusion of many stories of offenders, to be effective. In the 121 mini reflections Don has captured the multi-faceted dimensions of prison ministry and named its

unrelenting and diverse demands and opportunities. This book is an important read for seasoned chaplains who want to be confirmed, refreshed and encouraged in prison ministry, and also a significant resource for use in the education of new chaplains and chaplaincy volunteers. The structure of the book in one-page reflections also makes it useful as a way to initiate group discussion with offenders and their families, and in the education of prison staff about the role of chaplaincy.

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Kingston.*

The Messenger: Friendship, Faith, and Finding One's Way.

Douglas John Hall. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011. Pp. xi + 168.

This beautifully written book recounts the story of Douglas John Hall's friendship with Bob Miller, a relationship that began at a young adults retreat in the summer of 1948. Robert Whiteley Miller, a recent graduate of Emmanuel College, who had served two years on the Shellbrook (SK) mission field, led the study and worship sessions. Hall, twenty years old, working in the office of a Woodstock (ON) newspaper, had questions. Miller had wisdom, possibly answers, and took an interest in Hall. Thus began a friendship lasting until Miller's death in December, 2003.

Following that summer retreat, Miller undertook post-graduate theological study in Edinburgh and then Basel. Hall recounts receiving letters from Miller that inducted him into an intellectual dimension of the Christian life, a dimension that gradually became his vocational direction (23). It was Miller who suggested that Hall apply to Union Theological Seminary in New York, where Hall met and married Rhoda Catherine Palfrey (Miller preached at their wedding) and earned his theological degrees. The Hall-Miller friendship was maintained through letters and visits, often in the company of mutual friends. We move with them through the 1950s, the turbulent 1960s, the 1970s, right into the first decade of this century. The resulting picture offers a window on the lives of a generation of Canadian Protestant intellectuals, now in their twilight years. In this day of e-mail, it is fascinating to read about the correspondence Hall and Miller carried on by surface mail up until

Miller's death, often with months separating letters sent and received. Equally fascinating is that Hall saved these letters and that we can read excerpts from them in this book.

This book is about a relationship. At its heart is Bob Miller: a complex, dedicated, multi-talented, somewhat reclusive Christian, ordained in The United Church of Canada, with a unique and profound pastoral ministry in relation to Hall and many of their friends. We read of the traumatic death of Hall's father at age forty-five and Miller's pastoral presence afterwards (68-69). This is also a book about the times through which Miller lived and the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in which he was deeply involved, and by which he was employed through the 1950s and 60s. We read of his work in the SCM, about SCM work camps, of how and why Miller began and built up the SCM Book Room in Toronto, only to resign in the face of conflict over how it should be run. Hall describes the deep pain this caused Miller, and yet how Miller began anew, opening the Bob Miller Book Room, which continues today. Their friendship continued after Miller retired and moved to Victoria, where he died.

For Hall, Miller was a messenger of the distinction between Christian faith and moralism. Miller saw Christian faith as about the acceptance of one's self and others, the recognition of distinct gifts, and a transcendence of captivity to immediately prevailing ideas and practices through study, worship, service and dialogue with others. Moralism is a reduction of Christian faith to an unthinking demand for adherence to a particular ethical vision. As a young man, Hall was looking for something more than this. The words, actions and being of Bob Miller brought the message of God's grace, and with it, a call to the vocation of theology. Miller's message was one of acceptance, out of which came a call to be and act. Miller saw in Hall gifts and potential that Hall did not know he had. This book is an act of thanksgiving for Miller's life and witness.

In a closing chapter Hall reflects on the times through which he and Miller lived. Miller was a book steward; gifted, dedicated and caring for others. His work at the SCM Book Room was a vocation enabling others to become intellectually mature and thoughtful Christians. The conflict that drove Miller out of SCM Book Room may be characterized as a reduction of Christian faith to moralism, a kind of reduction which

Hall argues characterized the 1960s. Hall also reflects critically on how sexuality and sexual orientation have become defining aspects of human identity in Canada. For Hall, sexuality is an important aspect of being human, but by no means the most important.

This is a significant book for anyone who has lived through the years it traverses, for anyone reflecting on human relationships in light of Christian faith and for anyone interested in the human condition. It can help people to become more human.

*Don Schweitzer,
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Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being.

M. Shawn Copeland. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 186.

As a result of the action of the United Church's 39th General Council (2006), racial justice training became mandatory for serving clergy and available for lay leaders. The one-day training session was seen as an extension of the Anti-racism policy adopted by the denomination in 2000. Seminars helped clergy and other church leaders become aware of the needs and challenges of people living around us regardless of their ethnic origins.

If we are to minister effectively to an increasingly diverse society, however, our education cannot end with one mandatory seminar. M. Shawn Copeland's recently published book, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, is a resource for those interested in moving beyond the material offered in the one day learning event. Part of the "Innovations" series of Fortress Press, *Enfleshing Freedom* challenges our preconceptions of race, humanity, and our relationship with both God and Jesus Christ. It plunges us into an historical journey that may seem frightening and foreign to many of us, leading us to ask foundational questions about how we relate and minister to so-called "others."

Copeland confronts an important question: "What becomes of theology . . . if the body is placed at the centre of inquiry?" (ix) This one question informs her research, thinking and writing. She focuses her search for an answer to this question on the bodies of African-American

women (“black women”) in particular. Throughout history black women have been treated, according to Copeland, as being somehow less than “normal” (10) and as disposable “refuse” (1).

Addressing the historical experience of black women is a huge undertaking; so Copeland concentrates her argument on slavery itself. She names slavery a “social sin” (116) and describes how the bodies of slaves were seized, imprisoned, bought, sold, tortured, assaulted and destroyed. They were seen by their so-called masters as property and treated accordingly. Naturally, such treatment affects a woman’s ability to reproduce, raise her children in peace and security, and keep her family together as a unit.

While scholars and other writers previously have avoided these topics, Copeland confronts them head on. She calls these “new” topics (105) and stresses their importance by stating that Christ is in solidarity with enslaved people. She uses the eucharist as a way of bringing the experience of black women and Jesus himself together. Copeland also discusses the practice of lynching and how it relates to the suffering of Christ, arguing that the crucifixion of Jesus was a “first century lynching” (110). Bodies are broken both literally and theologically.

Copeland grounds her argument in history and Scripture, focussing on stories of creation and the experience of the first humans. She examines Paul’s warnings about the body and its potential for evil. Copeland also reviews Augustine’s thoughts on the body and its potential for sin.

While the reader may find the subject matter rather intense, and at times complex, it is nonetheless an important read because it confronts the reader with questions as to how we value and relate to others. We are challenged to re-evaluate how we establish who is “normal” and how we relate to those who live beyond the boundary of the normal. Renewing our knowledge of this part of human history and its effect on the lives of countless black women is relevant to our understanding of Christ’s suffering and execution. It is relevant also to how each of us lives out God’s calling.

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