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EDITORIAL

This issue of *Touchstone* is devoted to the topic of “free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other.” This is a concept that Michael Welker has been developing for over twenty years. Welker is a German Reformed theologian, born in Erlangen in 1947. Since 2013 he has been Senior Professor of Systematic Theology at Heidelberg University. He is also managing director of the *Forschungszentrum Internationale und Interdisziplinäre Theologie* in Heidelberg, which he co-founded. A former student of Jürgen Moltmann, Welker holds doctorates in theology and philosophy. He has been a guest lecturer in Asia, Europe, and North America, at institutions such as Harvard Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, McMaster Divinity School, and Cambridge University. He has received numerous academic awards. His work has been translated into a number of languages, including Italian, Chinese, Korean, and English. He has published significant books on the Holy Spirit, christology, creation, the Lord’s Supper, and the church, as well as many articles. He has been active in interdisciplinary dialogues on the topics of theology and the natural sciences, law, money, and anthropology. He has published on the theologies of Schleiermacher, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Moltmann, on the philosophies of Whitehead and Hegel, and the sociology of Niklas Luhmann.¹ While Welker is at home discussing these kinds of grand theory, his theological publications often feature close readings of biblical texts.

“Free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other” has been an important theme in Welker’s thought since the publication of his book, *God the Spirit*, in 1992.² It grew out of his study of early legal traditions in Exodus 20:22-23:19.³ Welker divides this material into three types of law: those having to do with crimes like theft or the destruction of property; cultic law concerning worship and the representation of God, and thirdly, the mercy code. According to Welker, the laws in this last group, such as “you shall not exploit a stranger” (Exodus 23:9), seek “to make mercy routine.”⁴ They focus on a particular type of behaviour: the “renunciation of rights”⁵ for the benefit of others who are weaker, marginalized, or

¹ For more information on Michael Welker and his work, see <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/theologie/personen/welker.html>.

² Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

³ Michael Welker, “Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel,” *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 242-254.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵ *Ibid.*

chronically disadvantaged. In *God the Spirit*,⁶ Welker explored how this theme of self-withdrawal was also present in prophetic writings about the bearer of God's Spirit and in Paul's understanding of life in the Spirit. Here Welker developed the concept of "free self-withdrawal for the benefit of others."⁷ In his recent book on christology he developed this further, adding the word "creative" and arguing that this theme from the mercy code is taken up and radicalized in teachings and parables of Jesus regarding the reign of God, so that the reign of God can be described as characterized by free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other, the poor, or discipleship to Jesus.⁸ Invoking Calvin's notion of Christ's three-fold office as prophet, priest, and king, Welker argued that Christ reigns where individuals or communities follow this pattern of behaviour. Welker notes that free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other can be a risky venture.⁹ It is not appropriate at all times and in all places. Sometimes the very different stance of assertive protest and resistance against evil modeled in Christ's prophetic office is called for.¹⁰ Still, where people exercise free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of others, the poor, or discipleship to Jesus, the reign of Christ is present through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹¹

While the wording Welker uses to describe this kind of action may be new to the United Church, what it describes is not. For instance, the United Church's Depression era "Report of the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order" noted as follows:

[S]ometimes for co-operation within the nation or among the nations, renunciation of one's own desires shall be called for, and that exclusive privileges and economic advantage for one's self must yield to the larger common welfare, so that suspicions and animosities will be displaced by community of purpose.¹²

This issue of *Touchstone* explores the theory and practice of free, creative

⁶ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 109-24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸ Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 223-4, 232.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247-8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹² *Record of Proceedings of the Sixth General Council of The United Church of Canada* (Kingston, 1934), 246-7.

self-withdrawal for the sake of the other. We begin with an article that Michael Welker has graciously given us that compares natural law to this pattern of behaviour. We then turn to the history of the United Church to see how this theory has been practised, with two articles examining occasions when an individual or the United Church as an institution has practised a form of it. The essay by Dr. Sandra Beardsall explores Samuel Chown's "fine act of self-renunciation,"¹³ which occurred during the United Church's inaugural General Council. The essay by Rev. David Kim-Cragg, explores how in the 1970s the United Church handed over the property it owned in South Korea to its South Korean mission partner. The final paper explores some aspects of this pattern of behaviour and ways in which it has been practised in the United Church and beyond.

Free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other is an important theme derived from the biblical traditions that is appropriate for many in the United Church today, as it seeks to live out its apologies to Indigenous peoples, its commitment to the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and its commitment to become an intercultural church.

Don Schweitzer (Guest Editor)

¹³ *Record of Proceedings* of the First General Council of The United Church of Canada (Toronto, 1925), 38.

GOD'S JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS¹

By Michael Welker

Anyone wishing to speak about God's justice and righteousness must anticipate that listeners will likely view this subject with enormous skepticism given the distressing and disturbing disposition of the world in which each of us lives and which each of us encounters both in the news and in our own immediate experience. For is this world not characterized precisely by glaring and appalling injustice? How can such a world be reconciled with a God whom not just Christians but indeed almost all religions associate with justice, righteousness, and kindness?

Those who would speak about God's justice and righteousness must take a position concerning the concept of natural law and its persistent influence, what Klaus Tanner has called the "long shadow of natural law."² Succinctly put, the reference is to efforts made over the course of Western cultural history to ascertain normative correlations between (1) divine legislation, (2) the regularities and order inherent in the cosmos and nature, and (3) the numerous political, legal, and moral attempts to establish salutary relationships and order among humans. Can one answer the question of God's justice and righteousness by way of reference to natural law?

Those who would speak about God's justice and righteousness are confronted with complex and fundamental religious concepts such as God's law, God's love, and God's Spirit. Although precisely these fundamental religious concepts often appear rather unclear or even pretentious, and as such strengthen skepticism against any talk of God's justice and righteousness, nonetheless they do—as I hope to show in the following discussion—offer points of departure for answering this question of God's justice and righteousness.

I. The Question of God's Justice and Righteousness in a World Experienced Largely as Unjust

Although righteousness is not the *only* characterizing feature of God for what are known as the Abrahamic religions, it is nonetheless one of the *central* features characterizing God's being. For without righteousness, God would not be God. God is not interested in keeping his righteousness to himself in some transcendent glory. Instead, that righteousness is

¹ Farewell lecture delivered on May 21, 2014, in the Old Auditorium of Heidelberg University.

² Klaus Tanner, *Der lange Schatten des Naturrechts: Eine fundamentalethische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart, 1993).

intended for humanity itself, and this bestowal of divine righteousness should prompt humans in their own turn to be grateful to God and to practise justice and righteousness with one another. The promise in Jeremiah 23:6, for example, picks up this nexus in maintaining that a righteous branch of David “shall execute justice and righteousness in the land,” receiving thereby the name of hope, “The Lord is our righteousness.”³ But even secularized and secularly inclined approaches associate God and righteousness, albeit with different accentuation. In his history of justice, *Storia della giustizia*, the Italian historian Paolo Prodi cites an anonymous adviser in the Republic of Florence in 1431: “God is righteousness, and whoever produces righteousness also produces God” (*Deus est iustitia, et qui facit iustitiam, facit Deum*).⁴ The following discussion will focus on both perspectives, namely, the theological and the secular.

Of course, a look at the world in which we live renders highly questionable such theologically alleged connections between righteousness as a characterizing feature of God, righteousness in the relationship between God and humanity, and interpersonal righteousness. How exactly are we to understand God’s righteousness when experience so clearly shows us that suffering, distress, and death rule in this world? After all, it is not just people who are old and sated with life who die; every day, people are torn from life in often gruesome fashion, or do not even have the chance to develop fully their vital forces of life. And the grief and sorrow such deaths evoke among those left behind, among family and friends, is unfathomably profound. The pain of loss does not abate, nor do the scars heal. Illness and distress similarly can rob us of both our vital energy and our joy in life. In our world, however, such pain and suffering are apportioned in an extremely unequal and unbalanced fashion.

If with Ralf Dreier we understand justice rather aridly “in the judicial sense . . . as that property of law through which a generally consensus-capable order for compensation and for the distribution of goods and duties is preserved or established,”⁵ then we can only say that

³ In the title of one of his books, Jürgen Moltmann transforms this configuration into a divine name: “His Name is Righteousness” (“*Sein Name ist Gerechtigkeit*”: *Neue Beiträge zur christlichen Gotteslehre* [Gütersloh, 2008]).

⁴ German translation, *Eine Geschichte der Gerechtigkeit: Vom Recht Gottes zum modernen Rechtsstaat* (Munich, 2003), 14.

⁵ Ralf Dreier, Justice and Righteousness V. Law, *Religion Past and Present*, Vol VII Joh-Mah, p. 113-114, 113 (Leiden/Boston, 2010).

our world is one characterized by catastrophic injustice. How can the disposition of a world characterized by the extremely inequitable distribution of goods, burdens, and suffering be reconciled with talk of God's justice and righteousness?

An even more dramatic view emerges when we acknowledge, as we must, that innumerable conditions in this world that are utterly inimical to the quality of life have in fact not only been created but are also created ever anew, without interruption, by humans themselves. Even if we are hesitant to repeat the shrill accusation that humans are "evil from head to foot,"⁶ we must concede that, both consciously and unconsciously, individually and systemically, humans cause one another what can only be described as an infinite amount of pain. And yet even these circumstances of experiencing suffering, on the one hand, and causing it, on the other, are woefully out of balance in this world. How can this sober realization be reconciled with references to God's righteousness if such righteousness aims precisely at prompting people to act in a righteous, just fashion?

Finally, all hope in the integrity of God's justice and righteousness seems to disappear when we are confronted by a realization most people prefer to ignore, namely, that all life lives at the cost of other life. The mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead repeatedly addressed this theme, articulating it, moreover, quite succinctly in the assertion that "whether or no it be for the general good, life is robbery."⁷ How can we speak about the justice and righteousness of God, of the creator of all things, if at the same time we see that the world in which we live is utterly permeated by sequential hierarchies of nourishment? Nature does, it is true, exhibit a high degree of beneficial organization, fruitfulness, and beauty. It surprises and delights through powers of regeneration and renewal. Every childbirth, every dawn, every re-emergence of spring is capable of eliciting such surprise and delight. At

⁶ Thus Karl Barth in his critique of Ludwig Feuerbach's identification between God and humans: "Indeed, anyone who knows that we humans are evil from head to toe, and anyone who considers that we must die, would recognize as the most illusionary of all illusions the assertion that the nature of God is that of humans. They would in any case leave the good Lord in peace with respect to such mistaken identification with such as we are, even if they considered him to be merely a dream in the first place." Karl Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," in idem, *Die Theologie und die Kirche: Gesammelte Vorträge*, part 2 (Munich, 1928), 212–39, here 237. Here Barth is essentially picking up Hans Ehrenberg's criticism of Ludwig Feuerbach.

⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929; New York, 1978), 105.

the same time, however, natural earthly life also exhibits the ineluctable cruelty characterizing life at the cost of other life. Even vegetarians must destroy infinitely much life to nourish themselves. Hence any unqualified references to nature and life as salvific concepts, or certainly any equating of God and nature, are naive and carelessly considered. Those wishing to avoid living under perpetual religious illusions, those striving for theological sincerity with respect to creation, must inquire concerning an understanding of God's justice and righteousness that acknowledges, incorporates, and does justice to this profound ambivalence attaching to natural life.

Even the priestly creation account at the beginning of the Bible favours this sober understanding. On the one hand, God calls the works of creation "good," that is, salutary for life; indeed, creation is even called "very good," that is, very salutary for life. We read in Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." On the other hand, creatures themselves are given considerable independent power and thereby also the capability of potentially endangering not only other creatures but themselves as well. The heavens separate, the earth brings forth, the stars acquire a certain rhythm and establish ages in both nature and culture, and human beings receive what in recent times has been perceived as an offensive commission for dominion. The *dominium terrae* in Genesis 1:27–28 regulates conflicts of interest between humans and animals and is associated with the explicit determination of hierarchies in the chain of nourishment. The powers of heaven and the celestial bodies can similarly behave in both a friendly and a hostile fashion. The sun warms, yet it also burns. Rains refresh, yet storms, tornadoes, and tsunamis also devastate and destroy. Even the fruitfulness of the earth and its living creatures are constantly exposed to destructive forces. Hence although natural creation is called "good," salutary for life, it is by no means paradise, that is, by no means life in divine glory.⁸

Creation myths of antiquity divinized heaven and earth, the heavenly bodies, and even monsters from the depths of the sea. By contrast, biblical thinking demythologizes this view and in the process respects the ambivalent independent power enjoyed by creatures. That is, the cosmos and nature are understood as having enormous independent

⁸ Cf. Michael Welker, "Was ist Schöpfung? Zur Subtilität antiken Weltordnungsdenkens," in *Jahrbuch der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften für 2006* (Heidelberg, 2007), 84–88; idem, *The Theology and Science Dialogue: What Can Theology Contribute?* Theologische Anstöße 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2012), 23–30.

powers at their disposal. Only uncultivated understanding can juxtapose creation and evolution antithetically. On the one hand, the cosmos and nature exhibit regularity, order, fruitfulness, and beauty. On the other hand, the forces of nature are transient and finite, subject to all sorts of danger and even self-endangerment, and they are intrinsically predatory: natural life can live only at the cost of other life. This radical difference between God and creation must be taken quite seriously. Once we do this, however, what consequences does this view then have for our perception and understanding of God's justice and righteousness?

II. *Can God's Justice and Righteousness be Grasped on the Basis of Natural Law?*

The situation I have described requires that we examine critically the traditional references to natural law as well as all attempts to relate natural law, divine law, and God's justice and righteousness. The classical collection of Roman law, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, in its initial section, *Institutiones*, subdivides private law into "the natural law, the law of nations, and the civil law."⁹ In 533, the eastern Roman emperor Justinian legally sanctioned this doctrine—"in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this view, natural law is

that law which nature teaches to all animals. For this law does not belong exclusively to the human race, but belongs to all animals, whether of the earth, the air, or the water. Hence comes the union of the male and female, which we term matrimony; hence the procreation and bringing up of children.

Thus it can be maintained that jurisprudence is not only the "science of the just and the unjust" but also "the knowledge of things divine and human."¹⁰

The problems raised by associating natural law with justice and righteousness become clear the moment we no longer fix and restrict our discussion merely to loving family relationships. The introduction to the *Institutiones* states the following: "The maxims of law are these: to live honestly, to hurt no one, to give everyone his due." The commandment "to hurt no one" is indeed quite difficult to apply to "all animals, whether of the earth, the air, or the water." The moment one accepts what is known as the "law of the strongest" as "natural law," the commandment to "give

⁹ *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, in *The Library of Original Sources*, ed. Oliver J. Thatcher, vol. 3: *The Roman World* (Milwaukee, 1907), 100–166.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

everyone his due” quite loses the aura that it somehow still involves justice and righteousness. The National Socialists, as is well known, positioned this expression—to *everyone his due*—cruelly and cynically over the main gate of the Buchenwald concentration camp, legible, moreover, from the inside.

Paulo Prodi’s history of justice claims to reconstruct “how the concept of justice has been lived and conceived in our Western culture.” Although this book’s German translation bears the subtitle “Vom Recht Gottes zum modernen Rechtsstaat,” that is, “from God’s law to the modern nation of laws,” references to God’s justice, God’s law, and God’s righteousness are remarkably pale and vague in all the book’s sources and interpretive discussions. The guiding perspective focuses on the correlation between the cosmic and the natural, and the political-legal arrangement and ordering of living conditions and relationships. In this context, divine law in connection with natural law is assigned the role of guaranteeing the normatively binding character of laws and their just disposition.

In his book, Prodi traces the perpetually changing configuration of divine law, natural law, cosmic and natural regularities, and also of the various political and juridical concepts of organization and implementation over the course of Western history. In their own turn, these perpetually changing configurations have been accompanied by the constantly changing dominance of various ecclesiastical, political, theological, juridical, and philosophical institutions and thinkers. Luther’s laconic dictum that “we prattle on a great deal about natural law” (*De lege naturae multa fabulamur*)¹¹ is trenchantly confirmed by the history of the development and reception of this notion of natural law. In modernity’s concentration on this theme, it is the human spirit and human conscience that acquire increasing significance. We now increasingly hear that natural law in fact resides in the human spirit itself, and it is the notions of individual conscience and moral communication that become important players in the multifarious conflicts between obedience to divine law, national law, the prince’s commands, and positive law. What ultimately emerges is that, on the one hand, conscience and positive law are emancipated from religion, and, on the other, that conscience as the inner judge, often in the name of God, is polarized over against professional judges in the name of society. But does reference to God’s law and God’s justice and righteousness not degenerate here into a mere cipher intended to underscore and reinforce the subjective sensibility and feeling for

¹¹ Martin Luther, WA 56, 355, 14.

morality and justice? Indeed, must we now abandon the question of God's justice and righteousness—between post-religious morals and vanishing stages of a subjectivist religious fundamentalism?

This situation has repeatedly prompted not only cries for a “return to natural law” but also laments over the loss of this particular point of orientation.¹² In his famous dialogue with Jürgen Habermas, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger found, on the one hand, that “the natural law has remained (especially in the Catholic Church) the key issue in dialogues with the secular society and with other communities of faith in order to appeal to the reason we share in common and to seek the basis for a consensus about the ethical principles of law in a secular, pluralistic society.”¹³ On the other hand, Ratzinger had to acknowledge that “this instrument has become blunt,” indeed, that the “victory of the theory of evolution has meant the end of this view of nature.”¹⁴ It is not, however, the “victory of the theory of evolution” but rather the deficient systematic tenability of the association between nature, on the one hand, and law that takes its orientation from justice, on the other, that enduringly deflates any hope that this instrument might take us further in the question of God's justice and righteousness.

III. *God's Law and God's Spirit*

In inquiring concerning God's justice and righteousness, we are inquiring concerning a discernibly efficacious power in the midst of the ambivalent disposition and organization of natural, real life. Many religious traditions have viewed this power as being associated with the divine word, with God's law, and with the divine Spirit. But we must first ask: What really is meant by this reference to “God's law”? Some Christian communities refer to the entire Old Testament as “God's law.” By contrast, certain theologians associate God's law with a mere conceptual figure, for

¹² Cf. Rudolf Weiler, ed., *Die Wiederkehr des Naturrechts und die Neuevangalisierung Europas* (Vienna, 2005); cf. the criticism of Ingolf Dalferth, *Naturrecht in protestantischer Perspektive*, Würzburger Vorträge zur Rechtsphilosophie, Rechtstheorie und Rechtssoziologie 38 (Baden-Baden, 2008); Michael Welker and Gregor Etzemüller, eds., *Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology* (Tübingen, 2013).

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger, “Presuppositions of the Law” in “That Which Keeps the World Together,” in Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller (San Francisco, 2006), 67–72, here 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* See in this regard Michael Welker, “Habermas und Ratzinger zur Zukunft der Religion,” *EvT* 68 (2008): 310–24.

example, with the divine command or the divine imperative—which admittedly can certainly mean different things to different people. Many circles in Jewish thinking refer to the five books of Moses as “the law.” Those five books of Moses contain three substantial law sections, including the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:22–23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 4–26; 29–30), and the Priestly Code (Exod. 25–31; Lev. 1–7; 11–26; Num. 1–3). And finally, certain Christian catechisms especially refer to the Ten Commandments (in two biblical versions: Exod. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21) as “the law.” What, then, is God’s law that reveals God’s justice and righteousness to us? The Old Testament, a canonical text that came into being over the period of a millennium? Certain selected texts from the five books of Moses? The Ten Commandments with their association of religious ethos and interpersonal ethos? Or is God’s law merely a religious-moral conceptual figure?

The various biblical texts that are referred to thus as “law” exhibit a clear, systematic fundamental structure. For Matt. 23:23, the “weightier matters of the law” involve the interrelation among “justice and mercy and faith.” And indeed, all the transmitted traditions of the law contain stipulations providing for the legal regulation of conflicts, stipulations focusing on the anticipated protection of the weak, and finally stipulations concerning both the individual and the collective arrangement of the relationship with God and of worship. Justice, mercy, and the cult—from the secular perspective one might say: justice, the systematic protection of the weak, and the search for truth. Here we encounter a systematic fundamental structure of the law.

This differentiated union of justice and mercy, or of righteousness and systematic protection of the weak, is of key importance for discerning God’s justice and righteousness and their normative and liberating potential, *for here the law establishes a value system that in fact runs counter to the natural tendency of life, namely, counter to the tendency to preserve oneself at the cost of other life* (as discussed in part 1). This close connection between righteousness and mercy prompts humans to practice *free and creative self-withdrawal on behalf of others*, that is, to withdraw one’s own self so that another person or other people might have access to their full scope of development and life.¹⁵ In family life and in love relationships involving one’s partner or parents, this free and creative self-withdrawal on behalf of others does indeed seem “natural,” that is, as deriving from or given by nature itself. What, however, prompts people to

¹⁵ Cf. Michael Welker, “The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 225–35.

exercise mercy and loving care and concern *beyond* the obvious circle of children, ill family members, or aging parents and grandparents?

An appeal to the doctrine of nature here suffices as little as does an evocation of the notion of interpersonal obligation or duty. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of God's justice and righteousness focuses on a paradox that is certainly also accessible to non-religious thinking. The free and, in love, often joyous creative self-withdrawal on behalf of others, though running *counter* to the natural tendency of life for self-preservation and self-assertion, is nonetheless experienced *not* as a diminution and restriction of life but rather, quite to the contrary, as an *expansion* of life, an intensification of life. In innumerable, often inconspicuous acts of consideration, of loving care and concern, of gracious accommodation, of both small- and large-scale assistance to others, though also in more emphatic contexts of love and forgiveness—in all such situations, humans get outside and beyond themselves in the truest sense of that expression. Above all, however, the same, ongoing self-withdrawal and self-transcendence are exercised on their behalf as well by other humans. These powers of free, creative self-withdrawal on behalf of others, exercised far beyond, for example, parental care and concern, surround human beings no less than do the forces of nature.

In the midst of the fundamentally predatory disposition of natural life, forces are thus at work that warrant our closer attention. Biblical traditions as well as the Qur'an repeatedly associate God's justice and righteousness with God's mercy. The Jewish Kabbalah speaks of the two hands of God, righteousness and mercy, emphasizing that without God's mercy, the world would suffer grievously from God's righteousness.¹⁶ The association of righteousness with mercy lends sensitivity, humanity, and universal charisma to the striving for justice and righteousness. The association of mercy with justice in God's law aims at expanding the protection of the weak *beyond* the context of family, cordial relations in daily life, and tribal thinking.

Despite the inconspicuous nature of countless individual actions and experiences of free, creative self-withdrawal on behalf of our fellow human beings, we are nonetheless dealing with a force, a power that changes and shapes life itself and that, as such, runs counter to the melancholy accompanying the perpetual transience of natural life. Religious faith generally views this force and power as a gift that distinguishes human beings in a special way. On the one hand, their natural

¹⁶ See in this regard Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago, 2008), esp. the epilogue, 206–9.

life is wretched and frail; as Qoheleth says, all human beings, like animals as well, “are from the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Eccl. 3:20). On the other hand, God has assured human beings that they have been made but “a little lower than God” (Ps. 8:6). In all their life possibilities, human beings are created in the image of God, and, as such, thus as witnesses to God’s justice and righteousness, and it is through the divine spirit that this power is bestowed upon them.

Although this divine spirit has under the influence of certain philosophical traditions repeatedly been identified with intellect and reason, doing so does not adequately grasp either its inconspicuous nature or its power and charisma. Biblical traditions compare it to the natural forces of wind and rain. It comes over persons, is “poured out” over them. By saying that God’s Spirit is poured out over men and women, old and young, male and female slaves (Joel 2; Acts 2), promises concerning the outpouring of the Spirit in the Old and the New Testament are introducing a subversive or even revolutionary perspective. Here the life conditions of the subordinate, dependent, and unfree members of society are being positioned at the center of attention in what are otherwise patriarchal, gerontocratic, and unchallenged societies of slaveholders. Expectation is being directed toward change, toward a transformation of unequal and unjust conditions, toward change on which God’s law, too, focuses.¹⁷

An appeal to divine justice and righteousness is a message of the power of empathy and critical vigilance. In the midst of a creation that is radically different from God, a creation that despite certain features that do indeed attest order and beauty is nonetheless incontrovertibly predatory, frail, and transient—in the midst of all this, extraordinary and remarkable counterforces are nonetheless at work: forces of compassion, mercy, and love; forces accompanying the search for truth and justice; forces that despite their distinctly inconspicuous nature nonetheless possess enormous creative charisma; forces that direct us toward a life *beyond* the natural inclination for self-preservation.

The enhancement of life in free, creative self-withdrawal of human beings on behalf of their fellow creatures is the secret of divine justice and righteousness in this world. A decidedly non-illusory, realistic element of hope accompanies this justice. In his Heidelberg farewell lecture in 2013, Paul Kirchhof brought *hope and (academic) research* into intimate correlation.¹⁸ Fifty years ago, the pioneering work of Jürgen Moltmann,

¹⁷ See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, new edition (Eugene OR, 2013), esp. 108-158.

¹⁸ See Paul Kirchhof, *Recht lässt hoffen* (Munich, 2013).

Theology of Hope, disclosed the powerful connections between spiritual, ethical, and sociopolitical impulses of hope.¹⁹ The power of free, creative self-withdrawal that surrounds us transformationally in an infinite variety of forms and figures is a constant source of hope.

Although God's righteousness is simultaneously associated with broad temporal horizons that far transcend human planning and calculations, this notion does sometimes prompt the suspicion that the workings of the Spirit are nothing more than a beautiful illusion and that all this talk about God's righteousness is in reality but a poor strategy of consolation in the midst of wretched and unjust life.

In biblical contexts, divine justice and righteousness are associated with the disclosure of realistic horizons of recollection and expectation. Inspired by God's own Spirit, the human spirit can direct its attention outward, into grand historical contexts. Although it is indeed capable of becoming involved, through recollection and expectation, in the interests, concerns, and dynamics of power of its immediate spatial and temporal surroundings, it does not allow such concerns to fetter or blind it. In this sense, God's justice and righteousness are instead taken as the constant touchstone for assessing political and religious dynamics of power and rule. Even prophecy, which in principle represents a critical immune system against the abuse of political and religious power, must itself be measured and tested ever anew against God's justice and righteousness and be thereby distinguished from false prophecy. The openness of human beings to God's justice and righteousness becomes universally subject to being tested ever anew against the criteria of either increasing or decreasing empathy, mercy, willingness to forgive, and love, as well as against the criteria of the resultant freedom and peace.

Divine justice and righteousness renew and refresh the conditions of creaturely life in often quite inconspicuous ways. On those who allow themselves to be sustained and elevated by and through them, they bestow a charisma that wins over hearts and consciences. Such charisma is at work in many forms of gratitude, joy, and imitation in daily life. Indeed, it comes to representative, luminous expression in the life testimony of persons whose lives' paths may well have seemed to be characterized by failure.

Thus did Dietrich Bonhoeffer formulate his own message of God's nearness in the midst of oppressive experiences of anomy, violence, lies, and hopelessness, imprisoned in a cell in Berlin and subject to constant bombing attacks on the city. Martin Luther King, the target of violent

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London, 1967).

hatred, recounts that after a day of being plagued by forty telephone calls threatening him and his family, a voice lifted him up in the midst of his despair, saying, "Stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world."²⁰

The testimonies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King are but the tip of a powerful force of actions, utterances, behavioural modes, though also profound experiences of suffering, that in any given instance are in fact not directly legible, as it were, or visible to any appreciable extent. They do, however, speak representatively for myriad lives that from within their own sufferings and impotence are seized by the power that becomes tirelessly engaged for justice, mercy, love, freedom, and peace—in a world characterized by a pronounced lack of peace, freedom, kindness, mercy, and justice.²¹ Because this power is neither driven nor guided by nature, neither can it be comprehended or grasped by the concept of natural law. It is instead a free, creative mode of behaviour and action that elevates finite, mortal existence that otherwise seems condemned to ultimate futility. In religious and spiritual contexts, this power is identified as God's justice and righteousness.

Given the inaccessibility of this righteousness, its character as a gift, and precisely considering the fact that it does not correspond to the elemental dynamics of natural life, spiritual sensibility and thinking have instead maintained that it is discernible in a higher life, in divine, eternal life. For the Christian faith, this righteousness acquires clear contours in Jesus Christ, in his life, his charisma, and his spirit. The Christian faith and its churches try to witness in word and deed to this righteousness in charitable acts, in proclamation and teaching, and in the life of worship. The purpose of today's lecture has been to provide an introduction and critical access to precisely these dimensions.

In his reforming inspiration, Martin Luther discovered the

²⁰ Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens, with Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt, and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 8 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis, 2010); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986), 58; see in this regard also Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, 2013), 16–27; 304–13.

²¹ Contemporary and historical contexts are illuminated by the contributions in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge, 2010).

elevating, healing power of God's righteousness, which had previously been hidden from him. He had, he writes, "come to hate this expression 'God's righteousness,' which [he] had learned to understand according the general use of the expression by all the doctors," namely, as the righteousness and justice with which God "punishes sinners and the unrighteous." But when Luther finally comprehended that God's righteousness is in fact a *gift* with which God heals and lifts up human beings, "I felt," he recounts, "utterly reborn and as having entered paradise itself through open gates."²²

It could not be the purpose of this lecture to awaken among you the kind of inspiration and excitement of the sort that Luther acquired for God's uplifting righteousness. Its goal was instead to question critically the unfortunate alliance between God's justice and righteousness, on the one hand, and an alleged natural law, on the other, and to arouse your interest for God's creativity in a creation that is clearly different from God.

²² See WA 54, 185–86, 24.

“THE VISION OF AN ARCHANGEL, THE ENTHUSIASM OF A PROPHET, THE SOUL OF A HERO”: S.D. CHOWN’S “FINE ACT OF SELF-RENUNCIATION”

By Sandra Beardsall

The Deed

Robert Knowles could not contain his astonishment. As a fifty-seven year old Presbyterian minister, author, journalist, and frequent contributor to the *Toronto Daily Star*, a man who was accustomed to interviewing celebrities and politicians, one might assume he could sustain an observer’s impassive gaze. However, the event he covered at Metropolitan Church, Toronto on the evening of Tuesday, June 16, 1925 got the better of him:

Very remarkable instance, this memorable incident, of how a great man may do a simple and kindly thing, not for a moment dreaming of anything but the expression of a noble impulse, and an unselfish heart, suddenly recognizing, as Dr. Chown must recognize, that the thing so unconsciously done has become an influence upon the life of a church and a nation, a pace-setter for hundreds of thousands, a gulf-stream in the often chill ocean of religious gatherings and debates.¹

What had Dr. Chown done? The Rev. Dr. Samuel Dwight Chown had stepped aside. Chown was the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church, the largest church entering the union of three Protestant denominations and the Council of Local Union Churches. At the moment that the national governing body, the General Council of the newly minted United Church of Canada was about to elect its first leader, Chown, the clear frontrunner for the role, asked to address the floor. From a prepared statement, he read, in part:

I rise to ask that no ballots be cast for my election as Moderator . . . May I ask you to make your vote unanimous tonight, and to this end, as the very first motion I have made, in this first General Council of the United Church of Canada, may I move that a ballot be cast by the Secretary, for the election of the Rev. George Campbell Pidgeon, D.D., as its first moderator.²

¹ United Church of Canada Archives, S.D. Chown fonds, fonds 3009, 86.008C-box 15-file 441, newspaper clipping: R.E. Knowles, *Toronto Daily Star*, June 18, 1925.

² *Record of Proceedings* of the First General Council of The United Church of

In a gesture of goodwill towards Canadian Presbyterians, who had divided bitterly over the decision to enter union, Chown withdrew from a mantle that was almost certainly to be his—the most prestigious honour of the day in Protestant Canada—and asked it to be conferred instead upon the Presbyterians’ leader, George Pidgeon. As Chown put it in his statement: “for reasons which I cannot delay to enumerate, but which may occur to you, I have felt that a Presbyterian had better be selected as Moderator of The United Church of Canada.”³

This “organic union” of historic Protestant denominations, the first of its scope in the world, had garnered global attention. Chown’s act rippled outward. The *Christian Century* reported: “For a moment the surprise took our breath away, then the stupendous graciousness and magnanimity of this self-effacement evoked such applause as has not been heard in a church court in our generation.”⁴ The press received Chown’s withdrawal as an astonishing moment of “self-effacement” that left the people “breathless.”⁵ It baptized the new denomination with grace and hope: perhaps this difficult birth had been worth the struggle.

In hindsight, however, Chown’s renunciation of the Moderator nomination—and his anointing of Pidgeon—raises interesting questions. This small example of “creative withdrawal for the sake of the other” offers an opportunity to study such behaviour. We will investigate it by setting the context, particularly Chown’s personal history and role in Canadian Methodism and the quest for church union; then looking more closely at the act itself as it took shape; the aftermath, and finally, some analysis: what was the worth and heft of this self-sacrifice?

The Context: S.D. Chown and Canadian Methodism

Samuel Dwight Chown was born in 1853 at Kingston, Canada West, into a prominent Methodist family.⁶ After serving rural missions and attending

Canada (Toronto, 1925), 36-37.

³ Ibid, 37.

⁴ United Church of Canada Archives, S.D. Chown fonds, fonds 3009, 86.008C- box 15-file 441, newspaper clipping: *Christian Century*, July 2, 1925.

⁵ Ibid., *Toronto Globe*, June 17, 1925.

⁶Genealogical information taken from United Church of Canada Archives, S.D. Chown fonds, fonds 3009, 86.008C- box 16-files 455, 456, S.D. Chown, “My Life,” typed manuscript ; file 467, Eric V. Chown, “Outline of My Father’s Family” typed manuscript.; Henry J. Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1912), s.v. Chown, Rev. Samuel Dwight.

Victoria College in Cobourg, he was ordained into the Methodist ministry in 1879. He ministered in the Ottawa Valley, then moved on to serve urban congregations, first in Montreal, and then a series of Toronto churches. Having encountered and embraced the Temperance movement early in his ministry, Chown was eager to harness Methodist zeal and political will for wider mission and moral reform. Occasional success against the “liquor people” showed Chown the power the churches could exert in the public sphere.⁷

Chown left the pastorate in 1902 upon his election to serve as the Secretary of the national church's new Department of Temperance and Moral Reform.⁸ He (rightly) declared himself “the first man appointed by any Church in the world to develop the social consciousness of a great Church and Country in regard to problems of a moral, economic, industrial and social nature, and to apply Christian intelligence to their solution,”⁹ although American Methodists and Canadian Presbyterians were not far behind in creating similar departments. Chown knew that the task would be difficult, as he would be leading the charge against well-funded liquor, opium, and race track betting operations. “It will indeed need the vision of an archangel, the enthusiasm of a prophet and the soul of a hero to endure the opposition that will be engendered and to make safe and assured progress,” he mused.¹⁰

The efforts of Chown and his department gained the attention of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier and other government officials, and for the next eight years the church launched successful campaigns against opium trafficking and race track gambling, as well as initiatives for prison reform.¹¹ Chown did not lack confidence in himself or the extent of his mission, observing in a 1904 journal entry: “I am now fully launched upon the vast enterprise of Christianizing the Dominion of Canada so far as my limited ability will permit.”¹² That “vast enterprise” expanded in 1910, when the General Conference elected Chown to serve first as the Church's co-General Superintendent, then as sole General Superintendent from 1915 to 1925.¹³ At the reception to introduce Chown in his new solo post,

⁷ Chown, “My Life,” 39-44.

⁸ Douglas Walkington, *Methodist Ministers in Canada, 1903-1925* (n.d., n.p.), s.v. Chown, S.D.

⁹ Chown, “My Life,” 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51-57.

¹² *Ibid.*, 49, citing diary entry of Jan. 1, 1904.

¹³ Chown, “My Life,” 61. Dates confirmed in Walkington, *Methodist Ministers*,

Sir William Hearst, the Ontario Premier, gave the address of welcome. Chown wrote of the occasion:

[H]e recognized that I belonged to a new generation, that leadership of the highest order was needed and that it was not the leadership of the autocrat, nor the dogmatist, but the leadership of a man who recognizes the authority of democracy.¹⁴

The Deed Takes Shape

The foremost task of Chown's national appointment was the promotion of church union. The "Basis of Union," outlining the contours of the theology and polity of the new church, had been completed in 1908, but the process had been slowed by the emergence of a strong anti-union movement among the Presbyterians and the upheavals of the Great War. Canadian Methodists were mostly unified in their support of union, and Chown became a relentless proponent of the cause. His support was wrapped up in his social vision: "Why should we who bear allegiance to one Kingdom and are animated by one purpose hoist . . . different banners which exhibit our separateness rather than our unity?" he asked in a 1912 sermon. Further, this social vision was not for the church alone, but for the nation:

Let us remember as we cast our ballots [for or against union]; that this Canada of ours is God's last opportunity of building up a Christian nation upon virgin soil, and we cannot allow little things to stand in the way of the best means for accomplishing this great purpose.¹⁵

Chown claimed that he himself had suggested the new church's name: "The United Church of Canada."¹⁶ He was not alone in promoting church union as a nation building project—it was a goal shared by pro-union Presbyterians—but as a national leader, with powers so allegedly extensive and a personal style so determined that anti-union and other detractors called him the "Pope of Methodism,"¹⁷ Chown was church union's most prominent evangelist. And union eventually won the day. The first meeting

s.v. Chown.

¹⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵ Sermon reprinted in Schwarz, "S.D. Chown," 219-221

¹⁶ Chown, "My Life," 87.

¹⁷ For extensive discussion of the "Pope" label in Canadian Methodism, see Silcox, *Church Union in Canada*, 148-49.

of the newly inaugurated United Church of Canada's General Council, in June 1925, would prove to be both Chown's finest moment, and his last hurrah.

With the Presbyterians divided, Methodists formed the largest denomination entering the United Church. The new church's polity did not include a "General Superintendent." The highest profile went to the Moderator, chosen by the elected members of the General Council to serve one two-year term, with limited powers.¹⁸ His position in the Methodist Church and his protracted service in the struggle for union made S.D. Chown the obvious choice for Moderator. It was therefore truly a moment of high drama when Chown rose, just as the nominations were about to proceed, and asked to address the Council. He then read aloud his three-minute statement.

Although he claimed that it was "hastily prepared," Chown's statement was carefully crafted. He began with the request that "no ballots be cast" in his name, returning to his theme only briefly in the middle of his remarks, saving his second request for the punchline: that one ballot be cast for Pidgeon. Otherwise, the statement resembled a campaign speech for the position: Chown described his own vocation, vigour, and fitness to serve (pertinent as he was now seventy-two years old), the spirit of John Wesley that had made church union possible, and the kindness of the Methodists in honouring him as General Superintendent in successive landslide elections. All of which made his final request—his motion that the Secretary cast one ballot for George Pidgeon—a dramatic reversal. The words had their intended effect. As the *Toronto Globe* reporter described it, there was "just a pause until the full significance of the words were grasped; then a tremendous wave of applause swept through the building."¹⁹ Recovering itself, the Council did as Chown requested, and elected Pidgeon the United Church's first moderator by unanimous ballot.²⁰

The chair of the session called the new Moderator to the platform, where the Council received him "enthusiastically," and it was left to George Pidgeon to put the deed into words. The minutes record that he "paid high tribute to Dr. Chown's fine act of self-renunciation—the finest act of this kind in the history of Canadian Christianity. He then in a few well-chosen words acknowledged the high honor conferred on him and

¹⁸ For Moderator term and powers see *The Manual* of The United Church of Canada (2013), Bylaws, Section E4.1.

¹⁹ *Toronto Globe*, June 17, 1925.

²⁰ Chown, "My Life," 88; the entire statement is reproduced in RoP 1925, 37-38.

promised to render all service possible in the interests of the United Church.”²¹ The Council further moved that a committee draft “some suitable recognition” of this “noble act of self-effacement” (carried by standing vote), which was then delivered to the Council as a “report” two days later.²²

Reaction to Chown’s move was swift and glowing. Church periodicals in the USA and England and secular newspapers in Canada noted the act with exuberant phrases commending “the stupendous graciousness and magnanimity of this self-effacement,”²³ and “so fine and practical an exemplification of one of the Christian graces.”²⁴ The secular press also effused. R.E. Knowles, after acknowledging the magnitude of Chown’s personal sacrifice, went on to proclaim its significance: “He has dignified the entire council—for we are all made great in the greatness we appreciate and admire. He has ennobled the United Church of Canada.”²⁵

So, did Chown jump, or was he pushed? One can imagine that a person of such robust ego—so certain of his role in Canadian church life, so unabashed in accepting the mantle of national leadership—could be reluctant to relinquish this prize, and may have required the encouragement of others. Some historians harbour the suspicion that arm-twisting was involved. However, we have no evidence that Chown was coerced into his renunciation. In his prepared remarks, he emphatically resisted that notion: “Permit me to say,” he stated, “that I am taking this step without a hint or suggestion that I should do so from any one, and of my own perfectly free will. I have simply considered the whole situation with as calm judgment as I possess.”²⁶

No one publicly challenged Chown’s assertion. Edward Schwarz argues that “Chown had preached [sacrifice] as an essential element in Christian living for decades,” and goes on to quote an undated (presumably earlier) sermon in which Chown asserts that the “decrease of self which is essential to a right life can be brought about effectively in no other way than by the means of Christ in our hearts and lives. The Cross is the

²¹ Chown, “My Life,” 88.

²² RoP 1925, 45-46.

²³ United Church of Canada Archives, S.D. Chown fonds, fonds 3009, 86.008C Box 15, file 441, *The Christian Century*, July 2, 1925

²⁴ Ibid, *The Hamilton Herald*, June 17, 1925

²⁵ Ibid, *Toronto Daily Star*, June 18, 1925. Other laudatory clippings in this file include American Methodist and Congregationalist periodicals, British Methodists, and the United Church’s *New Outlook*.

²⁶ RoP 1925, 37.

instrument by which this is done.”²⁷ Chown understood the role, and the soul, of a hero. Sometimes a hero, especially a hero for Christ, must renounce a worldly prize. Therefore, he jumped.

The Aftermath

Despite the accolades, the United Church did not appear to know what to do with the “uncrowned but Kingly Chown.”²⁸ Perhaps there was not room in the church’s ranks for one of Chown’s stature to be anything but the supreme leader. Perhaps the new leaders feared antagonizing the former Presbyterians among them by inviting Chown into the inner circle. Whatever the reason, after 1925, Chown was not asked to serve on any significant boards or committees. He decided that this slight had a divine purpose: to give him time to write a book.²⁹ He published *The Story of Church Union in Canada* in 1930,³⁰ noting that it was, “written as a tonic and to restore the morale of the United Church,”³¹ a nod to the lingering struggles of the young church to justify its existence. Chown did not go entirely unrewarded, however. He garnered several honorary doctorates from Canadian and American theological schools, and in 1975, was featured on a Canadian postage stamp. Thanks to the efforts of a clergy mountain climber, a peak in the Rocky Mountains (in Mount Robson Provincial Park) bears the name Mount Chown.

Meanwhile, the United Church could not sustain the momentum of its founding events. Skirmishes with the continuing Presbyterians over the division of property and representation in world communions lasted more than a decade.³² Ironically, while attention focused on the moderatorial laurels, the real executive power in the national United Church had been vested, perhaps unwittingly, in the position of General Secretary. With a Presbyterian Moderator, it was only fitting that a Methodist should fill this position. T. Albert Moore, who had served as Secretary of the Methodist General Conference (an assistant to the General Superintendent) for two decades, was the logical candidate. He asked to

²⁷ Schwarz, “Samuel Dwight Chown,” 245, quoting S.D. Chown, “He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease.” Sermon, n.d., Chown Collection.

²⁸ Phrase attributed to Edmund H. Oliver in Chown, “My Life,” 101.

²⁹ United Church of Canada Archives, S.D. Chown fonds, fonds 3009, 86.008C-box 15-file 433, S.D. Chown, “Reasons for Writing the Story of Church Union in Canada,” undated ms, 1.

³⁰ Chown, *The Story of Church Union*, 80-105, and *passim*.

³¹ Chown, “Reasons for Writing the Story,” 3.

³² These disputes are described in N. Keith Clifford, *Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 207-222.

consider the nomination overnight, and then accepted it,³³ and served as General Secretary of the United Church until retiring in 1936 at age seventy-six. Some of the delays in the healing of wounds between the two churches could be traced to Moore's deep anger with continuing Presbyterians, who had, before union, labeled the new denomination an "apostate church."³⁴

The "Vision of an Archangel"?

S.D. Chown's great renunciation, then, faded quickly from view. Did it "ennoble" the new United Church? If measured by the immediate reaction it received, it did. Yet embedded within the gesture was something more complex. R.E. Knowles hints at it in his *Toronto Daily Star* article:

"The Methodists will put it all over you"—such was the choice and refined prediction which was so often hurled at our defenseless heads. "They will swallow you up," was another vivid prophecy. And how true! If Dr. Chown has not "put it over" the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists, and the church, and the nation, then we confess to ignorance as to the meaning of that cryptic trinity of words. But he has not "put it over" anybody, or any collection of bodies, quite so effectually as he has over the sneering throng who refuse to believe that generosity and mutual forbearance and a common enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God are anything but amiable fictions and that Christian love and courtesy are anything but a dream.³⁵

In Chown's act, the Methodists, who had been characterized by anti-union Presbyterians as empire builders, bent on creating not a church but a "religio-political machine,"³⁶ had, in the eyes of the pro-union Presbyterian Knowles, actually trumped the dissenters. Knowles saw this act as a victory for "Christian love," but love is a tricky thing. For indeed, a Methodist *had* bested the dissenting Presbyterians, and he had put the uniting Presbyterians in his debt. Chown's generous act placed Pidgeon in the awkward position of accepting an elected position as a charitable gift. It forced Pidgeon to spend his acceptance speech praising Chown rather than establishing his credentials and setting out his own vision.

³³ RoP 1925, 38-39.

³⁴ Clifford, *Resistance*, 224-226.

³⁵ Knowles, *Toronto Daily Star*, June 17, 1925.

³⁶ Clifford, *Resistance*, 121-122.

Further, Chown subverted his own commitment to “the authority of democracy” by pre-empting an election with his request to “cast a single ballot” for Pidgeon. He thus disenfranchised the first General Council, whether or not they—or he—realized it. He gave the elected commissioners little option but to choose “unanimity.” Chown’s “fine act of self-renunciation represented—albeit unconsciously—also an act of considerable power. It granted S.D. Chown a status (and a mountain, and a postage stamp) that George Pidgeon could never attain. It granted the new church a moment of grace and glory, but at what price to its ongoing life? In the end, did it achieve its purpose? Perhaps it would take the “vision of an archangel” to say for sure.

THE POWER OF LETTING GO: THE END OF THE CANADIAN MISSION TO KOREA AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE KOREAN CHURCH

By David Kim-Cragg



Near the historic site of SeoDaeMun (the West Gate) in the heart of Seoul, the South Korean capital, stands a little piece of Candaiana. Built as a home for a Canadian missionary in 1920, in the 1970s it was given to the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and became an important centre for the Christian Democracy Movement as well as ground zero for the development of the Korean MinJung theology. When I visited in the late 1990s the red brick house still had its original linoleum floors and wood framed single-pane windows.

Like the story of legendary Canadian Missionary Frank Scofield and his participation in the Korean independence movement of 1919, the story of the SeoDaeMun house, as it is sometime called, and its significance in the history of the Canadian Church mission in Korea is little known in Canada. It is a story of how the Holy Spirit triumphed in the church's struggle to

grow out of colonial mode of mission. It relates a difficult and long process of creatively letting go of privilege, control, and power by one group, and what can happen for the wider cause of justice as a result.

History of the Canadian Mission in Korea

It is widely acknowledged that from its beginning, coinciding as it did with the rise of European colonialism, the modern missionary enterprise was both complicit in the colonial project and guilty of perpetuating unequal, racist, and oppressive relationships. By the 1970s many in Canada were convinced that the missionary activities of the past century had been an embarrassing mistake.¹ Canada and its churches were responsible for sending out more missionaries on a per capita basis than any other nation on earth.² So it stands to reason that Canadian Christians had a lot to reflect upon.

Awareness of problematic power imbalances in church mission, however, did not suddenly arise in the 1970s. From even before Union, the Canadian church had tried to come up with a mission policy that would respect the indigenous church in overseas missions such as Korea.³ Canadian missionaries promoted the self-support, self-government, and self-promulgation of the indigenous church, and sought to limit its own influence such that their missionaries would be on an equal footing with Korean Christians. An independent Korean church was the goal right up until the late 1930s when the outbreak of World War II forced the Canadian missionaries to leave. Following the Korean War in 1954, missionaries returned to find a country devastated and the church torn apart by divisions. Confronted by a situation of real vulnerability, a “mother-daughter” bond developed between The United Church of Canada (UCC) and the new, liberal PROK, but it was also marked by tension. This was, from the point of view of both churches, a relationship that affirmed a shared vision but also compromised the independence of the PROK, an independence that both churches coveted. This harmonic dissonance would be a feature of

¹ Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott, *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 4-5.

² Robert Wright, *A World Mission: Canadian Protestantism and the Quest for a New International Order, 1918-1939* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 53.

³ William Scott, *A History of the Canadian Mission to Korea*, revised and expanded by J. Grieg McMullin (Belleville, ON: Guardian Books, 2009), 584.

the relationship for many years.⁴

As Korea recovered economically from the devastation of war, negotiations between the UCC and PROK regarding the relationship between them were ongoing. The 1962 Year Book contains a report from the Board of Overseas Mission reflecting this:

In May 1961, at the General Assembly [of the PROK] held immediately following the military coup an important decision was made that “the missionary work subsidy will not be requested hereafter”. There were probably many factors that were instrumental in the adoption of this resolution which sought to recall the church to its tradition of self-propagation and self-support in spite of the terrible pinch of post-Korean-War poverty and general economic debilitation. The United Church of Canada has conveyed to the Church its warm appreciation of the spirit of self-reliance which is willing to sacrifice in order that there may be far-reaching spiritual renewal throughout the whole Church. We have been assured that there is no desire on the part of the Korean Church to sever its relationship with the United Church . . .⁵

The Korean Church had refused funds from the UCC as a way of asserting its independence. The report reflects both the pleasure Canadians felt at this move and also the anxiety it produced. What did this mean for the future of the relationship? To the UCC’s apparent relief, the PROK had indicated it did not desire to break all ties.

As UCC Year Books continued to report discussions around the proper relationship between the two denominations, they also recorded the worsening political situation. The military coup mentioned in the 1962 report signalled the beginning of what was to become an increasingly oppressive military government in South Korea and a real crisis for the Korean church. By 1973 PROK ministers were being arrested for political dissent. But although people were more focused on the political situation, the issue of the PROK-UCC relationship was not forgotten. A UCC report in 1973 states:

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) in

⁴ William Scott, *History*, 386.

⁵ The United Church of Canada, *Year Book*, 1962, 187.

the last year has been so deeply involved in the crisis situation in Korea that there has been little margin of energy left for consideration of new forms of relationship to overseas churches. Nevertheless, each year finds the drive towards self-reliance that much more pronounced and with more responsibility accepted.⁶

By the next year both the political crisis and the desire to re-imagine the church relationship would reach a crisis, and the solution for the latter would end up having real consequences for the former.

Church Autonomy and Christian Involvement in the Korean Democracy Movement

Christian churches that became involved in the democracy movement in the 1970s made up only a fraction of the total Christian population of South Korea. The PROK was unique among Protestant denominations in committing itself early and enthusiastically to the struggle. Along with the Anglican denomination that joined in the 1980s these politically engaged denominations represented only 6.4% of the total Protestant membership of the country.⁷ As the percentage of Koreans who were members of a Protestant church at that time was less than 15%, the number of Christians belonging to a denomination actively involved in political protest was less than 1% of the entire population of South Korea. The question has been asked how such a small group was able to exert such a large influence on the movement. Korean scholar InCheol Kang says that part of the answer lies in the degree of autonomy these religious groups were free to exercise.⁸

The story of the UCC's creative withdrawal from its Korean mission helps to explain how the PROK found itself with the organizational autonomy that allowed it to be an effective leader in the democracy movement. We have already noted that historically the UCC mission policy tried to promote the independence of the Korean church. Despite the mother-daughter relationship that developed following the Korean War the commitment to that goal remained and leaders of the PROK felt it. The acquisition of the land for a new PROK seminary and the construction of its main building is a case in point. In 1957 the UCC donated \$100,000

⁶ *Year Book*, 1962, 187.

⁷ 강인철, 『저항과 투항 - 군사정권들과 종교』, 오산: 한신대학교출판부, 2013, 145쪽.

Kang InCheol, *Resistance and Surrender—The Military Regime and Religion*, (Osan: HanShin University Press, 2013), 145.

⁸ *Ibid*, 153.

towards the construction of a new seminary in the SuYu district in the north of Seoul.⁹ It was not the amount that made this donation significant but rather the spirit in which it was given. Then Principal Kim JaeJun noted that the gift came with no strings attached and that it acknowledged the independence and autonomy of the Korean church.¹⁰ For the PROK these gifts had an invigorating effect. They were seen as a vote of confidence, a sign that the “mother church” acknowledged its prerogative to make its own decisions. This contributed, in turn, to the freedom with which the Korean church could speak out on issues of justice and politics in its own country. According to former General Secretary of the PROK, Kim SangGeun, the UCC’s stance made it possible for the PROK to act independently as they saw the need. Other missionaries and sending churches tended to require that assets and funds be used in a certain way and that the receiving church toe the line on theological or political issues. This was not the case with the UCC, according to Rev. Kim.¹¹

The Struggle of Self Withdrawal

These accounts of how UCC support was understood by PROK leadership paint a positive picture of the UCC-PROK relationship, but they do not do justice to the struggle that actually occurred between the two churches in the process of realizing that healthy partnership. The lead-up to the momentous 1974 decision to transfer all the UCC’s holdings in Korea, including the SeoDaeMun house, to the PROK provides a glimpse into that struggle. In 1973 the UCC held a consultation in Toronto with mission partners from around the world. Rev. Yi YeongMin attended as PROK general secretary. In the midst of the discussions a matter came up regarding a farm in Korea that was owned and run by the UCC. United Church missionaries had been granted trial jurisdiction over the farm some time before, and in 1973 were working in cooperation with other Korean organization in running the farm without consulting the PROK on their

⁹ *The Life and Theology of Changgong, Kim Jae Choon*, ed. Hwang Sung Kyu (Osan: HanShin University Press, 2005), 170.

¹⁰ 가가가 가가가가가 가가 가가; 2001. 166 가

Kim, KyeongJae. *Kim JaeJun Biography* (Seoul: SamIn, 2001), 166.

Kim KyeongJae refers to a gift of \$10,000 but not to the \$100,000 gift. It is possible that he got the number wrong or that it was a misprint. Or it might refer to a prior gift for the purchase of the land. Regardless, he is clear on the point that the UCC was supporting the PROK unconditionally. He remarks that no expectation existed for someone from the UCC to participate as a professor or in the management of the school when it was finished.

¹¹ Interview with Kim SangGeun, July 5, 2015.

work.¹² The UCC had gathered all its mission partners around the world to hear about what was going on in their mission work. However, the contentious issue of the Iri farm had not found its way on to the agenda. Nevertheless, PROK General Secretary Yi patiently waited for an opportunity to raise it. Seeing an opening in the discussion he addressed the UCC leadership. About this farm in Iri, he said,

the work that these missionaries have been doing is our shared work and they came as partner missionaries to work with us. But changes to their thoughts and policies the general secretary of the [PROK] denomination knows nothing about. I don't understand this.¹³

It was a short protest but the words sank deep. In March of the next year another Mission Partnership Consultation was held in Korea just between the PROK and UCC. After an intense two days of discussions, the Revs. Yi JunMuk, Yi YeongMin, Jo DeokHyeon, Kim JeongJun, and Jo HyangNok from the PROK and the Revs. Elliot, Webster and Carey representing the UCC recommended steps to “enhance mutual understanding and fellowship” and emphasize “solidarity”¹⁴ through human and financial participation and collaboration. Ultimately this meant transferring to the PROK not only the farm that General Secretary Yi had mentioned the year before in Canada, but all UCC properties and assets in Korea. Unlike other denominations that had insisted on keeping their mission property, the UCC relinquished it all. For the PROK this meant that the Korean church would now be able to demonstrate its own ability, establish its own identity, and take responsibility for its own missions without help or support from outside the nation. For the UCC, the result was that rather than seeing the PROK as an object of charity, the Canadian church could join with it as a true mission partner.¹⁵ Coupled with the fact that UCC missionaries were now under the authority of the Korean church, the new arrangement signaled a paradigm shift, the effective end of the

¹² 가가가가가가가 가가가가가가가가100가가가가가가 가가가가가가가가: 가가: 가가가가가가가가가가가,1998

Living Together in Hope: Celebrating the Centennial Anniversary of the Partnership in Mission of the PROK and the UCC (Seoul: Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea Press, 1998), 82.

¹³ Ibid, 83.

¹⁴ Ibid, 80.

¹⁵ *Living Together in Hope*, 82.

Canadian mission to Korea and the beginning of a true partnership. Yi YeongMin sums up the importance of this transfer in a 1995 report to a joint meeting of the PROK and UCC:

It was an epoch-making occasion for policies of both churches and for the self-support plan of the PROK. Discussions took place in an atmosphere of frankness and cordiality. Ways of discontinuing recurring budget from DWO [UCC Division of World Outreach] were agreed upon. The PROK was to receive titles of property held by the DWO. The so-called “Canadian Mission in Korea” would cease to exist and the PROK would assume the responsibilities of placement of missionary workers, etc. At the same time, the UCC made a suggestion to actualize this kind of policy. It must be said that in those days, the UCC was the first in taking the lead in making suggestions and implementing such policies over other overseas church mission stations in Korea. This meant laying trust in our maturity and sense of responsibility.¹⁶

Among the properties handed over in this transfer was the house in Seoul. To this point it and other buildings on the property near the West Gate in Seoul had been the residence of UCC missionaries. The transfer of their home to the PROK significantly changed the missionaries’ relationship with the Koreans with whom they worked. This Korean account is given:

The especially exciting thing was that the house and furniture for DWO missionaries was shared as one family between the two churches with everything shared in common and we were shown a glimpse of the simple life that missionaries lived.¹⁷

¹⁶ Lee, Young-Min. “A Reflection on the History of Mission and Cooperation of the Churches in Canada and Korea.” 1995 Mission Consultation between the UCC and the PROK, August 16-18, Academy House in Seoul.

¹⁷ 가가가가가가 가가가가가가가가100 가가가가가 가가가가가가가. 가가. 가가가가가가가가가, 1998, 83

Living Together in Hope: Celebrating the Centennial Anniversary of the Partnership in Mission of the PROK and the UCC, (Seoul: Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea Press, 1998), 83.

For Koreans, this transfer pulled the curtain back on the lives of the missionaries who had been living among them for many years. For many this intimate glimpse of their friends' lives was deeply moving.¹⁸ But the significance of the transfer of that building went deeper still. The missionaries' residence became an important meeting place in the democratization movement. Actions of resistance were planned there including the execution of the March 1 Declaration of National Salvation¹⁹ (cited in the church report below). This "March 1 Statement" was a significant moment in the South Korean democracy movement.²⁰

At the same time as this activity was occurring, the old house, which was the main building on the SeoDaeMun site, was being transformed into the Mission Education Centre. This was a school at which political dissidents who had been prevented from attending theological seminary because of political persecution could still study to attain ministry credentials.²¹ Of course these people received a strong education in political resistance as well as theology. Yi KwangIl, later the first missionary from the PROK to the UCC, was among those who attended the Mission Education Centre after his release from prison.²² Ahn ByeongMu, regarded as one of the fathers of Korean MinJung theology, became the principal of the school after the government forced him out of his teaching job at the PROK seminary. Indeed, the Centre is regarded by some as the birth place of MinJung theology,²³ a theological and philosophical paradigm that helped animate the democracy movement in a significant way.²⁴

¹⁸ Interview with Jeong SukJa, April 15, 2015. Rev. Jeong spoke emotionally of the meaning that Willa's witness and way of life had for her. She particularly mentioned her humility and her philosophy of living with little so that others would not go without planted seeds of God's love in people's hearts.

¹⁹ Willa Kernen, "It Was Impossible to be Uninvolved," in *More Than Witnesses: How a Small Group of Missionaries Aided Korea's Democratic Revolution*, ed. Jim Stenzel (Seoul: The Korea Democracy Foundation, 2006), 283.

²⁰ Wi Jo Kang describes this event as "the most eventful and climactic demonstration of all Christian political dissent under the Park regime . . ." Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 113.

²¹ The government made it illegal to attend theological seminary for anyone who had been arrested for political opposition to the Park dictatorship.

²² Interview with Yi KwangIl, April 29, 2015.

²³ Interview with Kim SangGeun, July 5, 2015.

²⁴ George Katsiaficas, *Asia's Unknown Uprisings*, Vol.1 (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 145.

The UCC's self-withdrawal out of respect for the independence the PROK was arguably a significant factor in the vigor and effectiveness with which the Korean church was able to engage in the democratization movement. Curiously, UCC reports that followed fail to reflect the decision of the March 1974 consultation or grasp its significance. The Division of World Outreach (DWO) included the following in its report two years later:

In spite of the difficulties of the times, the Presbyterian Church in the ROK is committed to an exciting new enterprise. Moving from a sound theological foundation and commitment to social justice, they have sought an effective way to develop a trained laity for mission. In 1975 the General Assembly approved the establishment of a Mission and Education Centre in Seoul. Here lay formation will go forward through short term retraining, various kinds of courses, retreats, devotional programmes, etc. *The United Church of Canada has offered its Sudaimoon(sic) missionary residential property for this Centre.* In spite of the arrest of its three main staff members in connection to the March 1st statement . . . the church has indicated its determination to go ahead with the project.”²⁵

The report speaks of the UCC “offering *its* Sudaimoon missionary residential property” with no reference to the 1974 consultation or account of the transfer of properties. In fact, nowhere in any UCC Year Book is this decision mentioned. It is a strange omission for which no clear reason is evident. Nevertheless, the transfer of property to the PROK marks an important milestone in the UCC-PROK relationship with significant creative consequences for the mission of the church.

Conclusion

The SeoDaeMun house remains to this day a centre where important work is done in the area of human rights in South Korea. The story of how the house came to play an important role in the cause for democracy under South Korean dictatorship touches on the colonial past of UCC mission history. The history is testament to the way colonial attitudes are persistent and hard to let go of. At the same time it speaks of the courage of partner churches who have struggled patiently and faithfully to help the UCC to re-envision its relationships with them. The transfer of the SeoDaeMun

²⁵ The United Church of Canada, *Year Book*, 1976, 159. Emphasis added.

house and other UCC properties to the PROK deserves to be celebrated. Ultimately, for Christians, it is an event that reveals the power of the Holy Spirit to do amazing things when one group of people has the courage to step forward and another has the faith to step back.

FREE, CREATIVE SELF-WITHDRAWAL FOR THE SAKE OF THE OTHER

by Don Schweitzer

In the 1980s a friend of mine visited Nicaragua. He went to be in solidarity with people there and to gain exposure to their living conditions and church life. After returning to Canada he recounted what a Nicaraguan boy had said to him: “Why do you have so much and I have so little? I work hard. I do good work. So why do you have so much and I have so little?” My friend had no immediate answer. This question was partly about exclusion. Why do some people enjoy ample advantages and opportunities while the lives of others like that boy are restricted by lack of these? The answers to such questions are complex, as are the remedies for such injustice. One remedy is to give people suffering exclusion things like food and clothing. Such responses are an authentic recognition of another person when that person is destitute.¹ But recognizing and respecting the otherness of another person can sometimes call for a response that moves in another direction. Instead of giving a person tangible items like food or clothing, what is sometimes needed is to give them space.

Life can only flourish if it has adequate living space.² This includes the necessities of life, but also opportunities to develop, participate, and contribute to the larger world. Living space includes room for one’s culture, recognition from others, and freedom for self-determination. The Holy Spirit works to create such space for the excluded, oppressed, and marginalized through inspiring them and their allies to prophetic activity of protest and struggle. But as Michael Welker argues, the Holy Spirit also works to create living space for persons, communities and species that lack this by inspiring free, creative self-withdrawal by others for their sake.³ Through free, creative self-withdrawal people who have means and agency create space for those who lack this; space these others need if they are to exercise their abilities, live with dignity, and flourish. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked are the kinds of acts often required to meet the immediate needs of destitute people. But if the destitute are to flourish, at some point those aiding them need to ensure that they have the means and opportunity to feed and clothe themselves. This may require free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other on the part of those providing aid. This can be a form of care, complementary to acts like feeding the hungry,

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 33.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 276.

³ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 308.

that also recognizes and respects the otherness of others.

Free, creative self-withdrawal is part of healthy family life. Parents do many things for their children. But if children are to mature, at some point parents have to step back and let them do things for themselves. This dynamic is also part of healthy adult relationships between friends and marriage or life partners. Welker argues that biblical laws such as Exodus 23:10 extended this dynamic of making space for others from family and personal relationships into the social realm.⁴ Such laws comprise what he calls the mercy code.

Exodus 20:22-23:19, sometimes called the Book of the Covenant, is one of the oldest collections of law in the Old Testament. According to Welker, it contains three types of law: those dealing with justice, those dealing with worship, and thirdly, the mercy code.⁵ This third group of laws seeks to make mercy something one can expect from other members of the community.⁶ In a way somewhat analogous to social assistance in welfare states, these laws prescribe social protection and assistance for the weak or destitute. They also seek to integrate the vulnerable and disadvantaged into society, and to create an ethos in which self-withdrawal for the sake of the other becomes a characteristic activity going beyond what can be legislated. The mercy code intends to create an ethos in which self-withdrawal for the sake of others is practised freely and creatively.⁷ Some of Jesus' teachings radicalize the intent and demand of these laws and describe the reign of God as emerging in history where people practise free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of others.⁸ Such behaviour aims to enable the marginalized, excluded, and oppressed to become fully active in society so that in the future they can reciprocate this action to others.

The concern of feminist theology that women often suffer from a lack of opportunity⁹ may have induced Rosemary Radford Ruether to also emphasize a form of self-withdrawal. Ruether argued that Jesus called for

⁴ Michael Welker, "The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29/2 (June 2014): 3 (online version).

⁵ Michael Welker, "Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 242-54.

⁶ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 109-10.

⁷ Welker, "The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law," 3.

⁸ Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 224-5.

⁹ Catherine Keller, "Scoop up the Water and the Moon Is in Your Hands: On Feminist Theology and Dynamic Self-Emptying," in *The Emptying God*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 103.

and demonstrated a “kenosis of patriarchy.”¹⁰ He renounced the male power, status, and privilege of his time that kept most women subjugated to men. Jesus withdrew from this as a step towards more egalitarian relationships among women and men.¹¹ This withdrawal is required of others in positions of oppressive privilege and power for similar reasons.

What follows will explore this concept of free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other, the poor, or discipleship to Jesus. Welker has developed this idea over two decades with remarkable systematic coherence through attention to legal and prophetic texts in the Old Testament, the teachings and parables of Jesus, and the writings of Paul. Here we will examine what is involved in this kind of action, what empowers it, and some of the ways that it has been enacted.

Self-withdrawal: the creation of space for others

Self-withdrawal occurs when one has legal and natural rights to something and the power to assert these, but, instead of doing so, one withdraws so as to create space for others. This involves a renunciation of power and control by the self who withdraws, and often a sacrifice of potential good for the sake of enabling others to exercise their agency and potential or for something else to exist. Forms of self-withdrawal for the sake of others can be legislated, as in some biblical texts, to ensure a minimal space in society for the disadvantaged. But self-withdrawal can also be what Charles Taylor calls a vertical move¹² that goes beyond what the law requires and tries to create a new relationship between groups or individuals. Here it is a strategic move that is appropriate at certain times and places. Rather than remain in existing relationships of power, and legal or moral claims and rights, one makes space for the other by renouncing some of one’s own rights, power, or claims. In this way one attempts to move up to a new level of relationship with the other by creating living space for them which they would otherwise lack. As Welker notes, this self-withdrawal does not leave the other alone.¹³ One withdraws in order to create a new relationship with them in which they will have room to exercise their agency and be able to contribute to a common project with one. As Taylor notes with reference

¹⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward A Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹² Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 350.

¹³ Welker, “The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law,” 5, n37.

to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission,¹⁴ this kind of vertical move can help create a new future for those with rights and claims and those without.

Such self-withdrawal may take the form of granting forgiveness, or of granting power, status or privilege. It may be very costly to the one withdrawing. It can express a powerful recognition of the other's intrinsic value and place in God's creation. Risk and ambiguity usually accompany such self-withdrawal. There is no guarantee that it will achieve its intended goal.¹⁵ When power, privilege, and status are given to the other there is no certainty as to how they will use these. Also, the withdrawing of claims may seem to devalue the lives or work of those whom these claims represent.

Free self-withdrawal: what empowers it?

What motivates and empowers a person to freely withdraw so that others have sufficient space to flourish? Human life is described in various biblical traditions as "fleshly."¹⁶ Fleshly existence is finite and vulnerable. It exists in time and space, and is ultimately dependent on powers not its own.¹⁷ As a result, people often seek to preserve their lives by asserting themselves against others. When this happens, human life becomes oriented towards the flesh, that which is transitory and finite. The Holy Spirit works against this, seeking to align human life towards the coming reign of God, so that it finds its fulfillment in glorifying God. In order to work against the tendency of fleshly existence to seek to preserve and assert itself, people must be empowered by a love and sense of purpose that transcends themselves. This may come to people through the hidden presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world. For Christians, this empowerment comes ultimately through faith in Christ, who reveals the transcendence of God's love, and who calls and enables Christians to express this love in their own lives. As people do so, their "fleshly" existence ceases to be oriented solely towards the flesh,¹⁸ and instead becomes a further expression of God's goodness and beauty.

Justification by grace is also needed to sustain a transcendent sense of purpose. It gives one an identity that is not dependent upon one's performance or others' perceptions of it. It empowers one to accept

¹⁴ Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections*, 349-50.

¹⁵ Welker, *God the Revealed*, 232.

¹⁶ For example, Isaiah 40:6 RSV.

¹⁷ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

critique, admit one's sin, change one's practices, and persevere in following Jesus despite failures and mistakes. Justification by grace also provides a basis for recognizing the worth of others and accepting them as they are, even practising self-withdrawal for their sake, despite their differences from oneself. Finally, justification can empower one to shoulder the responsibility for freely giving up space and power amidst the ambiguities attendant upon this.

While free self-withdrawal bears witness to a transcendent source of empowerment, it often also has immanent motivations. The need for individuals or groups to withdraw often only comes to their attention "through the active assertion of those in need of space."¹⁹ Religions like Christianity call for earthly life to be conformed to a transcendent reality.²⁰ Christians with power and influence often only become aware that their presence is oppressive or constricting, or that their striving to conform life to a transcendent realm needs to be re-aligned, as a result of protests by those who lack living space. As the voices of the marginalized resonate with the symbol system, doctrines, and narratives of Christianity in ways that portray them as deserving inclusion and respect in light of these, they can help move Christians who have power and assets and who are at home in the current social order to recognize the need to practise self-withdrawal in order to create living space for them.

Self-withdrawal can also be motivated by self-interest if this promises to lead to a brighter future for those withdrawing. However, there are many gods and transcendent realities that call people to sacrifice for them. Free, self-withdrawal for the sake of others is faithful to Jesus when it is guided by his proclamation of the coming reign of God and the preferential option for the poor that he modelled.

Creative self-withdrawal

Self-withdrawal is appropriately creative when it opens up possibilities for something new that brings history closer to the reign of God. It is not only for the comfortable and well-off. It can also be necessary for marginalized and oppressed peoples trying to create a united front powerful or comprehensive enough to effect social change. An example of this is the way representatives of several hundred Indigenous Peoples' organizations

¹⁹ Nancy Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2000), 157. David Kim-Cragg's article in this issue indicates that such assertions by the United Church's Korean mission partners may have induced it to give its property in Korea to them.

²⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 134.

worked together to create a draft of what became the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

They came with cultural, ideological, and strategic differences; they were more likely to have shared a common experience of mistreatment than a common culture or economic structure. They were more alike in what they opposed than in what they sought to become. Seeking a fragile unity, they discussed many problems, drew up strategies, and came to consensus on many issues and positions. Faced with a diversity of visions and a complexity of strategies, we sought compromise.²¹

The creation of this draft document required various degrees of free self-withdrawal by the Indigenous organizations involved. For the sake of creating something new, a document that could express their traditional values, realities, and aspirations in the language of human rights, many of the organizations involved had to yield something for a consensus to be formed. This is an example of how free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other can sometimes be a necessary step on the road to effective self-assertion. Free self-withdrawal is often essential in this way for the creation of social justice movements and workers' coalitions, or for the creation of ecumenical relationships and shared ministries. Such organizations and movements assert moral and spiritual claims. But their creation and continued existence itself often represents a moral and spiritual achievement, made possible through various degrees of self-withdrawal on the part of those involved. Free self-withdrawal can thus help create unity among differing groups so that together they become part of a larger, more viable whole. The formation of The United Church of Canada was an example of this.

Free self-withdrawal can also help create a more diverse and just unity. The tolerance that different communities practise towards each other so that they can co-exist in a multicultural society is a form of self-withdrawal for the sake of the others, as tolerance "is the fruit of an asceticism in the exercise of power."²² In multicultural societies groups and

²¹ James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson, *Indigenous Diplomacy and the Rights of Peoples: Achieving UN Recognition* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2008), 49.

²² Paul Ricoeur, "The Erosion of Tolerance and the Resistance of the Intolerable," in *Tolerance between Intolerance and the Intolerable*, ed. Paul Ricoeur (Providence, RI: Berghohn Books, 1996), 189.

individuals must practise forms of self-withdrawal in order to make room for others. Furthermore, as communities diversify they may fragment if emerging groups do not find sufficient living space within them. To create this space, the community's dominant group may need to exercise self-withdrawal for the sake of emerging others. Examples of this are Korean immigrant churches in the Los Angeles area, which have made space for second-generation members by creating English-language ministries for them.²³ Second-generation Korean-Canadians and Americans usually have different worldviews and spiritual needs from their parents. If accommodation for this is not made, they may leave their parents' congregations to form their own.²⁴ Conversely, The United Church of Canada's move to become an intercultural church in 2006 can be seen as a form of self-withdrawal on the part of its Caucasian majority in response to the expressed needs of ethnic minorities within it.²⁵ Denominations like the United Church that have traditionally been religiously dominant in English-speaking Canada have "a hidden ethnicity"²⁶ that to date has been normalized by their surrounding society. This hidden ethnicity often functions normatively within them, posing barriers and restrictions within the denomination to those who are ethnically different. After ethnic minorities in the United Church reported that the normativity of its hidden ethnicity was oppressing them and called for change, the national United Church committed itself to becoming an intercultural church, so as to create greater space within itself for ethnic and racial difference and become a more diverse unity.

Free self-withdrawal can be creative in other ways. Faith in Jesus' resurrection often requires forms of free self-withdrawal from economic, cultural, and political power structures for the sake of discipleship to Jesus.²⁷ St. Francis of Assisi is a paradigmatic example of how such self-withdrawal can create space for a new kind of Christian existence. As the United Church's 1978 report, *The Lordship of Jesus*, stated, the problem for many middle class Canadians is not that they refuse to acknowledge

²³ Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

²⁵ *Record of Proceedings* of the Thirty-Ninth General Council of The United Church of Canada (Thunder Bay, 2006), 579-90, 747-9.

²⁶ Kim, *A Faith of Our Own*, 157.

²⁷ Hans Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1989/1985), 314.

any lords, but that they often have too many.²⁸ Jean Vanier is a recent example of free self-withdrawal from established social roles and career paths for the sake of discipleship to Jesus that opened up a new form of Christian existence that has benefitted marginalized people and challenged exclusionary social norms and expectations. After withdrawing from careers in the navy and academia, Vanier eventually founded a group home for people with developmental disabilities, which he called L'Arche. Following his vision and leadership, this has become a worldwide federation of L'Arche homes that provide liberation from institutional confinement for people with developmental disabilities, and opportunities for Christian community and discipleship for others.

Free, creative self-withdrawal can also be appropriate when one recognizes that others are more suited for the task at hand than oneself. The words of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) "Christ has no hands . . . but yours," are sometimes sung in United Church worship,²⁹ and are often true. But sometimes Christ does have other hands than ours. Sometimes those other hands are better suited than ours for the work at hand, and sometimes they can only do that work if we get out of the way. Samuel Dwight Chown seems to have been thinking along these lines at the United Church's first general council when he asked that no ballots be cast for himself as moderator, and that all those present join him in acclaiming George Pidgeon as moderator.³⁰ Extending this to the level of culture made a form of self-withdrawal an appropriate response by the United Church to postcolonial developments in its overseas mission fields. The United Church's 1966 *World Mission* report noted that in countries with cultures shaped by religions other than Christianity, Christians who shared this culture were often much more effective in mission work than foreigners from elsewhere. In light of this, the report stated that the United Church's practice of sending Canadian personnel to such countries needed to be abandoned in favour of a new mission policy of putting "primary emphasis on the support of indigenous churches"³¹ and their personnel. Here a form of free self-withdrawal on the part of the United

²⁸ *Record of Proceedings* of the Twenty-Seventh General Council of The United Church of Canada (Calgary, 1977), 422.

²⁹ The United Church of Canada, *More Voices* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House/Kelowna: Wood Lake Publishing Inc., 2007), # 171.

³⁰ Chown, a Methodist, explained his action thus: "For reasons which I cannot delay to enumerate, I have felt that a Presbyterian had better be selected as Moderator of The United Church of Canada;" *Record of Proceedings* of the First General Council of The United Church of Canada (Toronto, 1925), 36-37. Chown's action is analyzed in Sandra Beardsall's article in this issue.

³¹ *Record of Proceedings* of the Twenty-Second General Council of The United Church of Canada (Waterloo, 1966), 344.

Church was necessary to create space for others and a new relationship with former mission churches that are now referred to as our overseas mission partners.

Free, creative self-withdrawal can also be for the sake of the natural environment. Jürgen Moltmann suggests that Leviticus 25:1-7 extends the mercy code to include the natural environment.³² Today this is urgently needed. The ever-increasing power of technology to intervene in nature means that instead of only worrying about what nature can do to people, people now have to worry as much or more about what they are doing to nature.³³ The current rate at which Western nations and, in particular, middle and upper class Westerners consume natural resources and pollute the environment is unsustainable. It is unjust to the poor and future generations, and damaging to ecological systems necessary for plant and animal life. An appropriate response to this for middle and upperclass Westerners is to practise a form of self-limitation,³⁴ to withdraw from the habits and patterns of excessive consumption that surround us in order to make space for other forms of life and the flourishing of other people.

The Glory of God

What happens when people withdraw for the sake of others? If it goes well something of the reign of God emerges in history, and God is glorified. In Romans 14:1-15:12, Paul addressed a conflict between the “strong” in the church at Rome, probably a Gentile-Christian majority, and the “weak,” probably a Jewish-Christian minority.³⁵ Paul argued that since Christ died for all, the strong should practise free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the weak.³⁶ Why? So that there would be room in the church for both, and their diverse voices could join in praising God, thus extending and increasing God’s glory.³⁷ As the glory of God is the Holy Spirit, the bond of praise and love between the first two persons of the Trinity, the extension and increase of this bond of praise and love in time and space brings a relative but still real increase to the being of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. Why practise free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of

³² Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 114.

³³ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 102.

³⁴ Sallie McFague, *Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 84 and passim.

³⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 835.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 877.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 885.

the other, the poor, or discipleship to Jesus? When we do so at appropriate moments, it can bear powerful witness to the ultimacy of God's love. When this enables diverse parts of creation to flourish together and join in praising God, it brings an increase to God's being and joy.

Conclusion

Free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of the other is not the only way to follow Christ. If someone is drowning and you are onshore nearby with a life-line, you shouldn't withdraw. You should throw them the life-line. Sometimes the Holy Spirit demands such immediate interventions in the lives of others. Sometimes it inspires prophetic struggle denouncing idolatry, injustice, and demanding change. The Barmen Declaration was not an instance of self-withdrawal. Neither was the American civil rights struggle, or the work of Canadian residential school survivors that led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. But the Holy Spirit also acts through those with means and power practising free, creative self-withdrawal for the sake of others. As Christians practise this, they bear witness to God's transcendent love and the coming reign of God. By so doing, they glorify God and further express God's goodness and beauty in time and space.

Mercy needs to be encoded in law, so as to provide a social safety net for the vulnerable. But mercy also reaches beyond what the law can codify. Because distress "has many different and ever-changing new faces,"³⁸ mercy calls for sensitivity to new forms of deprivation, so that those who do not suffer from these will still perceive them and respond compassionately.³⁹ Sometimes mercy calls for acts of charity or prophetic protest. Sometimes it calls for free, creative self-withdrawal that opens up spaces in which others can flourish, and by doing so, lights the way for the law to follow.

³⁸ Walter Kasper, *Mercy* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

PETER GORDON WHITE¹

By Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr



The diffusion of Christianity is the most important subject that can engage the attentions of men.
—Egerton Ryerson²

Peter Gordon White was born on 23 November 1919 just outside Glasgow, Scotland. His father, John Gordon White, worked as a printer at Collins book publishers and served in World War I in France, Italy, and Macedonia. His mother, Christine S. Curtin, was a suffragette.³ The family came to Canada in 1923—a move completely organized by Christine—and settled in Winnipeg. White’s parents were a big influence on him and his sister, Harriet Christine.

John became a teacher and a labour conciliation officer with the Manitoba government; Christine worked as an accountant and freelance writer. She helped to organize the Consumers’ Association of Canada and was a founder of the Red River co-op and women’s volunteer bureau.

During World War II, Christine left home to work for the Wartime Prices and Trade Board in Ottawa and received the OBE in 1946 for her service there as Chief Labour Liaison Officer. Under the pen name “Marsha Moore,” she wrote an advice column for teens and young adults, discovering that their three main problems were lack of knowledge about sex, lack of money, and religion. At age fourteen, during the “Dirty ’30s,”

¹ United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA) biography file W7.

² According to John Robert Colombo, ed., *Colombo’s Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1974), 517: “‘The first sentence of Ryerson’s to appear in print,’ in 1826, according to Robin S. Harris who quotes it in *Our Living Tradition: Second and Third Series* (1959), edited by Robert L. McDougall.”

³ On John and Christine White’s 60th wedding anniversary, 1 November 1976, the *Toronto Star* published a story on them. John’s advice to husbands was this: “Having a clever wife is a help to a man, not a hindrance . . . Don’t resent it if your wife turns out to be the manager of the family. Hand the job over to her.” He also advised, “Never let civil wars (quarrels) stay in the home overnight. Never let them go so far that they poison your relationship.” Christine died on 10 December 1978, eleven days after John.

White quit high school, finishing at night, and worked as a compositor in a print shop, passing his Typographical Union qualifications with “the highest grade ever achieved in Manitoba.”⁴ He then paid his way through university by working as a stringer for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He held an undergraduate scholarship in English history at United College in Manitoba from 1939–1943, graduating with his BA in 1943, and then studied theology, graduating in 1946. During his undergraduate years he won prizes in Greek, current affairs, and public speaking, and was president of the student council, still finding time for acting and directing.

White had gone to university “with the idea of becoming a writer and perhaps a publisher but came out a minister of The United Church of Canada.”⁵ He was ordained on 6 June 1946 by Manitoba Conference, did some further study at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and received his B.D. degree in 1950. By 1964, when he was awarded the honorary D.D. degree, United College was in the process of becoming the University of Winnipeg.

Almost immediately after ordination, White went into educational ministry, as Field Secretary of Christian Education for Manitoba Conference, where he remained until 1949 when he moved to Toronto to take up the job of Assistant Editor of the Department of Sunday School Publications, apprenticed to Dr. George Little and Dr. Archer Wallace.

On 24 June 1950, Peter Gordon White married Mary Patricia Armstrong (Pat) in Earls court United Church in Toronto. Their children David Gordon, Patricia Jean, and John Gordon were all born in Toronto between 1951 and 1956, and adopted careers in medicine, ministry, and music, respectively. Pat, a psychiatrist, co-authored a book with her mother-in-law, *To Love is To Grow*, published in 1962 by Abingdon Press and distributed in Canada by the United Church Publishing House.

In 1953, at only 34 years of age, White became editor-in-chief of the “New Curriculum” (NC) for Sunday school. By then, the UCC had been clamouring for its own curriculum that would meet the specific theological beliefs of the church, rising “out of the ferment of the time . . . part of the new theological stirring . . . part of the desire for rethinking educational principles.”⁶ The 1950s, with its baby boom, seemed like the

⁴ Bruce McLeod, “The Best Moderator We Never Had,” Peter Gordon White obituary, *The United Church Observer*, May 2013, 35.

⁵ Profile, Department of News Services, Division of Communication, June 1974, 1. UCCA bio file W7.

⁶ Excerpted from the Finding Aid for Series VII: The New Curriculum, Subseries 1–9, UCCA.

right time to launch such projects, as more children than ever before would be entering Sunday school. From the beginning, the designers of the NC hoped that it would reach beyond the UCC; it was, in fact, adopted by Canadian Baptists as well.

The NC was the largest publishing project ever undertaken by the United Church and likely by any Canadian publisher before or since, with the possible exceptions of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. The massive project—begun at the 1952 General Council with the decision to produce new materials—would occupy twelve years, full time, of White’s career. The project involved managing the writing of a series of learning materials for everyone in the church, from kindergarten to adult, in a three-year cycle. Before a word could be written, detailed field consultations on a national scale and the writing and rewriting of the Presuppositions (theological specifications) to guide the project were required. Ironing out the Presuppositions took several years, with final approval at General Council in 1958.⁷ The main presupposition was that it was time that the teaching of the churches catch up with the teaching of the theological colleges.

The process of curriculum design—with a six-year projection for writing and editing, and the involvement of many scholars, pedagogues, teachers, and artists—then began in earnest. White’s job as editor-in-chief involved carefully planning every detail, writing funding proposals, recruiting and training staff, and handling any controversy or crisis that might arise; it also involved accountability for production deadlines, promotion, and interpretation. A gifted writer, painter, and expert in photography and the use of visual aids in education, White brought all these talents to the NC. Over the years, he wrote many articles, radio scripts, and biblical studies. His book, *The Mystery of the Rock*, was one of the NC “reading and research” books for Grades 4–6.

“Hard to discourage, impossible to dislike,”⁸ White was an excellent administrator and diplomat. Besides the management of his own department, White’s job included collaborative work inside the church as

⁷ See Peter Gordon White and Wilbur K. Howard, “Progress in the Development of New Curriculum,” November 28, 1960: “About 9:00 p.m. on November 3, 1959, the Executive of General Council approved plans for a new curriculum for Sunday Church Schools in The United Church of Canada.” For a more complete history of the New Curriculum, see Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr, *The Downfall of the Ryerson Press*, PhD thesis, 2014, University of Ottawa Library, “Appendix 6: Brief History of the New Curriculum by Olive D. Sparling.”

⁸ McLeod, “The Best Moderator We Never Had,” 36.

a member of the Committee on Christian Faith, the Board of Publication, and the Board of Christian Education, and outside the church on the National Council of Churches' Curriculum Development Council and the joint Baptist–United Church committee. He even found time to teach the junior Sunday school class at Applewood United Church in Mississauga, a form of field-testing his own ideas and material.

By March 1962, a decade of work on the NC was beginning to bear fruit. The first book—*The Word and the Way* by Donald M. Mathers, professor of systematic theology at Queen's University—was not, as one might have expected, for the youngest Sunday school grades, but rather for the adults. There was no point in releasing the NC, White felt, without first teaching the Sunday school teachers, parents, and any other interested adults how to approach the material. *The Word and the Way* paved the way for the rest of the curriculum and sold 600,000 copies, “unheard of for a Canadian title.”⁹ Besides Sunday school teachers, parents were also seen as key players. As United Church historian Phyllis Airhart notes, the NC “focused on the family as integral to Christian education, and produced hardcover illustrated books intended for reading at home during the week” instead of the throwaway periodical format of previous years.¹⁰

By February 1963 White reported that a print run of the first 400,000 books of the NC was on its way, with similar print runs for each of the following eight years “if the planning of the past ten years proves sound.”¹¹ In other words, sales of over three million copies of the various books were expected. By then the investment in the project had been enormous, with specifications completed for each age group in each of the three lectionary years; the development of new periodicals, *The Christian Home* (to support the parents), *Focus*, and four others; three writers' conferences; the development of a five-year promotion plan; field testing of materials; and the preparation of layouts, printing specifications, and schedules for the writing and production of the books, schedules so complex that they papered the walls of White's office. Eight editors worked directly on the book and periodical components of the project.¹²

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Phyllis Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 171.

¹¹ Peter Gordon White, Editorial Report, February 20, 1963, UCCA.

¹² White, Editorial Report, February 20, 1963: “Uniform lesson quarterlies, one editor; Four Weekly papers, three editors; Periodicals such as FOCUS and THE CHRISTIAN HOME, one editor; New Curriculum reading books and teacher's guides, three editors.”

Despite the sound planning of a decade, however, the New Curriculum ran into financial trouble in the late 1960s. There were two main reasons for this. First, the decision to produce quality hardcover books rather than throwaway weekly papers meant that churches treated the books as class sets rather than sending them home for families to read together, thereby reducing projected sales and unwittingly undermining Christian family life. Second, a huge—and hugely unexpected—demographic and societal tsunami swept through the late 1960s, leaving Sunday schools reeling from dropout rates.¹³ Although one Sunday school teacher had thought the NC would be the answer to his prayers about dropouts,¹⁴ ironically, the biggest decline to date came the year it was introduced, 1964–1965.¹⁵ By 1966, the *Toronto Telegram* reported, 100,000 teenagers had disappeared from the rolls of United Church Sunday schools. The UCC was not alone in this exodus; the Anglicans had reached their peak enrolment in 1958 and had been declining ever since,¹⁶ the Presbyterians had been declining since 1962,¹⁷ and one Lutheran minister bemoaned the fact that “the church has practically done handsprings to keep these kids interested” to no avail.¹⁸

¹³ *Observer* editor Al Forrest was opposed to the secularism that began to sweep the nation in the late 1960s, calling it “the faith of Expo ’67” or “the belief that man can make it on his own, achieve and bring about a wholeness within his life without spiritual help.” He pointed to the inherent contradiction of such secularism, saying, “The spread of agnosticism and atheism today is also accompanied by a great search for some kind of affirmation” (“Rejecting Religion, Going it Alone Described as New Faith of our Time,” *London Free Press*, n.d., n.p., UCCA).

¹⁴ Len Dean, “New Curriculum Answer to Prayer,” Letter to the Editor, *Windsor Star*, December 12, 1964. UCCA NC Box 273, File 1.

¹⁵ Brian Clarke & Stuart Macdonald, Working Paper, United Church of Canada Statistics, 3,
http://individual.utoronto.ca/clarkemacdonald/clarkemacdonald/Welcome_files/unitedchurch.pdf

¹⁶ Brian Clarke & Stuart Macdonald, Working Paper, Anglican Church of Canada Statistics, 3,
http://individual.utoronto.ca/clarkemacdonald/clarkemacdonald/Welcome_files/anglicanchurch.pdf

¹⁷ Clarke & Macdonald, Working Paper, Presbyterian Church in Canada Statistics, 3,
http://individual.utoronto.ca/clarkemacdonald/clarkemacdonald/Welcome_files/presbyterianchurch.pdf

¹⁸ Aubrey Wice, “In Sunday Schools, ‘Handsprings’ Don’t Help,” *Toronto Telegram*, October 1, 1966. UCCA NC Box 273, File 6.

A closet Utopian and eternal optimist, White was perhaps one of the few people who had taken Hugh Pedley's novel *Looking Forward* to heart.¹⁹ The novel, published in 1913, imagines a post-church-union future where all mainline Protestant denominations—including the Anglicans, the Baptists, and *all* the Presbyterians—have joined to create a United Church as powerful on the Protestant side as the Catholic church. In fact, had the rate of church growth continued as in the 1950s, the United Church could reasonably have anticipated adding another million members by the early 1970s.

This great anti-authoritarian cultural shift and the beginnings of decline in United Church membership prompted White into rethinking his own theological and vocational path. After a period of serious reflection, he came back believing that society was “preparing for a new age of faith which will be quite different than the one we have gone through,” becoming a member of the Karl Barth Society of North America, founded in Toronto in 1972, and ready to tackle even more education. He undertook further studies at Syracuse University in New York State, the Toronto School of Theology, Leicester University in England, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and received his M.Th. in 1978. The last paragraph of his CV reads as follows: “I believe my experience and personal exploration, which I find profoundly religious, makes available some gifts that could be of value to my colleagues in a shrinking but vital believing community.”

Honest and open to a fault, White even listed “Psychoanalysis, Dr. S. Greben, 1969–1975” on his CV as a significant life experience. As his wife was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and he would be far more open to the idea than most men of his generation, this should not be interpreted as anything more than “personal exploration,” though it obviously coincides with the downward trend in church membership.

Besides declining church membership, however, a more public problem was the storm of publicity surrounding the NC, some of it quite negative. While “witty and eloquent” in its defence, White “coped with death threats by mail.”²⁰ Those who supported White credit him with setting the stage for “a mature and intellectually respectable faith,” though it took a heavy personal toll on him.²¹ White's report to General Council

¹⁹ Peter Gordon White, “Magnifying Voices, Sharing Visions,” in *Voices and Visions: 65 Years of The United Church of Canada*, ed. Peter Gordon White (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1990).

²⁰ McLeod, “The Best Moderator We Never Had,” 36.

²¹ Ruth Wilson (daughter of former Moderator Lois Wilson [1980–1982]) quoted in

in September 1964, entitled “Good News? . . . or Bad?” recommended “that this mission-minded church is . . . ready to respond here in Canada to the seemingly strong, outwardly skeptical, and spiritually dispossessed persons of our increasingly complex society.”²²

The massive New Curriculum project had certainly proven White’s value, and he was promoted first to the position of Secretary of the Board of Christian Education, then to Associate Secretary for the Division of Mission in Canada and Deputy Secretary of Ministry Personnel and Education (MP&E), and then to Deputy Secretary of General Council itself. The issues he dealt with in these positions ranged from continuing education to theology and faith to ecumenism (dialoguing with the Roman Catholics, the Jews, and the World Council of Churches). In his obituary of White, Bruce McLeod, himself a former Moderator of the UCC (1972–1974), called White “the best moderator we never had.”²³

White served General Council from 1979 until his retirement in 1985, which he compared to Prospero’s withdrawal from power in *The Tempest*: “it’s time to divest of power, influence and responsibility and stop running things.”²⁴ However, White could not resist publishing, and so was lured back to The United Church Publishing House in the 1990s to work with Director Catherine Wilson before retiring again when the church offices moved to Etobicoke in 1995.

On 12 March 2013, Peter Gordon White passed away peacefully with his wife, Pat, at his side. Friends and admirers remember him as “inspirational,” “unfailingly friendly, wise, gracious, interested in others” and always smiling; a man who “made everyone feel listened to and cared about”; a person with a “way of making life and work a delight.” “His heart and able mind were a great gift to the United Church and to all who crossed his path.”²⁵ The comments offered by Mardi Tindal, 40th Moderator of the United Church of Canada, are quite typical of the way colleagues felt about White:

McLeod, “The Best Moderator We Never Had,” 36.

²² White, “Good News? . . . or Bad?” 10, UCCA NC Box 272, File 5.

²³ McLeod, “The Best Moderator We Never Had,” 36.

²⁴ *Observer*, July 1985.

²⁵ These comments are taken from the online book of condolences posted by the funeral home: <<http://www.humphreymiles.com/book-of-memories/1519149/White-The-Reverend-Dr-Peter-Gordon/view-condolences.php>>.

Catching a conversation with Peter Gordon last spring at Rosedale was our last time to be blessed in person by his wisdom and grace. He began with “I don’t think we need to be worried about the survival of the church,” and proceeded with a fantastic history of times over the centuries when folks were sure the church was finished . . . before it was resurrected once again . . . He has touched our family over the generations. I remember my grandparents reading *The Word and the Way*.²⁶

Of all the great United Church publishers—an eminent group including book stewards Egerton Ryerson, Anson Green, and William Briggs; editors E. H. Dewart, W. H. Withrow, Edward S. Caswell, F. Sidney Ewens,²⁷ and Lorne Pierce; and *United Church Observer* Editor Al Forrest—Peter Gordon White was the last man standing.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Janet B. Friskney, “Beyond the Shadow of William Briggs, Part I: Setting the Stage and Introducing the Players,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 33, no. 2 (1995): 142, 143, 145, 148.

BOOK REVIEWS

Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet

Lyndal Roper. London: Bodley Head, 2016. Pp. 423 + 155.

This Oxford professor of history provides an important biography of Martin Luther with new insights into his origins, character, theology, and Reformation history in general. She does this through meticulous research into sixteenth century documents, some of which became accessible to Western scholars at the end of the Cold War (especially many of Luther's letters in his own hand). Luther's inner development is her focus, for she writes, "his theology sprang from his character" (11).

The early chapters provide a fulsome picture of his childhood—his family, home, and personal formation. His father was a prosperous smelter-meister at Mansfeld, part of the rising middle class of the sixteenth century. Uneducated, but a successful producer of silver and copper, he was an irascible, competitive, forceful man. Martin resembled his father in his rough, combative, uncompromising character. His mother, however, came from an educated family; she evidently had an influence on his developing piety, and encouraged him to seek education.

As a student at Erfurt University Luther leaned against scholasticism, toward the *via moderna* of Ockham, which emphasized critical thinking and particular empirical realities. Yet, when his life was endangered by a storm, Martin cried out to St. Anne for help and pledged to become a monk (46). In vivid detail our author tells the story of his life in the monastery, then as a lecturer at Wittenberg University. We learn of his despair of his own righteousness and his conversion to faith in God's grace through faith.

Her account of the early career of the reformer, from the Ninety-Five Theses to the Diet of Worms, depicts a courageous man standing up to the mighty—the emperor and the pope—risking death by burning for the sake of the gospel. His was a radical theology which set off waves of enthusiasm through much of Europe. Returning from enforced hiding at Wartburg Castle, however, Luther was shocked by the social and religious chaos that his teaching had evoked. Now we see a cautious, shrewdly pragmatic Luther, reversing developments that he had previously approved. He infamously condemned the rebellions of the peasants and encouraged their brutal suppression by the princes. We also learn much about Luther's wife Katharina, their happy, actively sexual marriage, their children, and household.

Roper notes Luther's positive attitude to the flesh and sexuality and his rejection of the sharp medieval distinction between matter and

spirit, showing that this cohered with his insistence on the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Real Presence, our historian tells us, should be seen as no less central to Luther's theology than the doctrine of justification. We hear of his uncompromising stance against Zwingli and Bucer, and their variously nuanced doctrines of the Eucharistic presence.

The controversy about the Lord's Supper appears to have been at the root of a complete physical and spiritual collapse, a severe *Anfechtung* suffered in 1527, when Luther experienced a crisis of faith. But he was totally uncompromising at a meeting of Reformation leaders in 1529, when the Reformed leader Zwingli suggested that they all receive communion together, in spite of disagreement. Luther's intransigent refusal ended the attempt of the Reformation movement to stand together. Increasingly, from this time, Luther demanded of his colleagues complete intellectual and spiritual submission. A sad story ensues of his harsh treatment of his early ally Karlstadt, and even his loyal friend Melancthon. His later years were marked by bitter attacks upon both enemies and friends. His words, in public and private, against his enemies, including Reformed and Anabaptist, were often grossly crude and malicious. Attacks on the Pope used shockingly coarse humour and scurrilous images produced by the artist Cranach.

From his youth, we are told, Luther shared the general anti-Semitism of medieval Europe, which tolerated the Jews but restricted their lives severely. Though Luther the early reformer advocated good treatment of the Jews to encourage their conversion to the Messiah, by the 1540s his hatred of the Jews knew no bounds. Roper cites his diatribes, which, far exceeding historic attitudes, called for secular authorities to burn down their synagogues and schools, demanded that their books be burned and that Jews be forced to do hard physical labour. Again, printed pictures of the crudest kind, encouraged by Luther, fanned the flames against the Jews in Germany.

Roper's account may cause his spiritual descendants to blush in view of certain aspects of Luther's character, words and actions. Yet it also evokes admiration of his insight, courage, and shrewd political pragmatism, without which the Reformation movement may not have survived.

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Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies**Edited by Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Scramm. Westminster John Knox, 2016. Pp. 280.**

This book provides a theological perspective on the impact of Martin Luther and the Reformation, and discusses the meaning of Luther's theology for the present. The twenty authors represented here tend to write from a liberal and ecumenical point of view. Their work suggests that contemporary reformation can still derive its inspiration from the perspective of Luther and the reformer's own context. Two things emerge from this book. First, it reflects on Luther as a Common Teacher—a *doctor communis* whose interpretation of faith and Christian practice has an ecumenical significance with the hope of benefitting the whole church. The authors discuss topics which are at the core of contemporary theological debate: the confidence in faith to fight hopelessness, the meaning of the theology of the cross, the resurrection, holistic aspects of marriage, Luther's reformed Eucharistic perspective of the sacrament, prayer life, politics and responsible governance, the articulation of the *sola scriptura*, and issues of suffering, and the feminist theology of the cross.

Second, the authors engage with areas of current theological debate in today's contextual theologies regarding how a contemporary reformation that embraces the values of Martin Luther's theology might look. The book as a whole amply demonstrates that a substantial basis for engaging some of the major theological issues facing the church of the 21st century could be found through an encounter with Luther's theology. Extrapolating from Luther's thought in his own context, Kirsi Stjerna argues that "if living today, Luther would be pro-gay marriage" (126). According to Stjerna, Luther "would consider it diabolical to prevent people from God's gift of marriage by any nonsensical human laws that put people in an untenable situation that leads them to sin and hurt" (xix,126). Stjerna argues this on the basis that Luther's arguments regarding marriage during the reformation reflect some of the issues and situations that the church faces today when church doctrine suppresses some of its members within the body of Christ by denying them what should be understood as God's gift for humanity. It has been argued that Lutheran theology has power to transform laws—even marriage laws. Considering the dramatic changes Luther's teaching on marriage introduced in his time and the connections Stjerna makes to the present, his argument merits careful consideration.

Various authors also reaffirm Luther's concept of *sola scriptura* as a Christ-centred tool for guiding the church's proclamation of Christ. For

Luther, *sola scriptura* meant that the church's proclamation was derived from Scripture alone. Reason had various roles in discerning and explicating the meaning of the gospel, but these did not involve determining the gospel's central content. This was intended to lead the church out of its Babylonian captivity, freeing its message from all social and political orders, so that gospel and the church might become agents of change and reform. The book emphatically stresses that Luther advocated liberation and justice with his principle of *sola scriptura*.

A third major topic discussed here is the theology of the cross, a central theme in Luther's thought. This discussion accomplishes an important retrieval of this aspect of Luther's theology for the present. At times, the theology of the cross and of the resurrection have been pitted against each other. Here it is argued that the theology of the cross should always be in the service of the practice of resurrection, just as the practice of resurrection should be exercised in relation to experiences of the cross. The role of the church which stands under the cross should be to provide a sanctuary aimed at bringing healing to the people who are broken, in pain, oppressed, and marginalized, so that through the lens of the cross they can have the hope of resurrection as an effective source of comfort and hope in the midst of their troubles.

The book includes a very helpful introduction which includes a systematic summary of its contents, outlining the contributions of each author. Those with a taste for socially engaged theology that draws upon the church's heritage to address issues in the present will find this book a stimulating and enjoyable read. It will be useful for clergy, seminary students, and theologians.

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Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine's Not Dusty**Catherine Faith MacLean and John H. Young. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2015. Pp.x+261.**

Minister and consultant Anthony B. Robinson once defined theology as “practical wisdom.”¹ While it has a reputation for academic abstractness, Robinson argues that at its core, theology concerns everyday human life.

In their recent book *Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine Isn't Dusty*, United Church ministers Catherine Faith MacLean and John H. Young have a similar task in mind. Their goal is to reconnect the doctrinal heritage of the Christian church to the contemporary practice of preaching. “There is wisdom in our traditions,” they write, “that speaks—in fact declares relevant truths. Sermons about doctrine should mean something useful, uplifting and worshipful. Doctrine can be a solid path to fresh thought, relevant commentary, and faithful proclamation” (5). Doctrine in the context of The United Church of Canada might often be thought of as irrelevant at best, or harmful and authoritarian at worst. For that reason likely, there are few books written for mainline church audiences that hold up the importance of doctrine, let alone doctrine in relation to preaching. In fact, I can't recall a book like this written for an audience in The United Church of Canada at all. Yet, McLean and Young want to show us that teachings at the core of our ancient tradition are always “fresh” because they continue to have world-altering power, especially through the act of proclamation.

In that sense, this book is both engaging and insightful. Each doctrine is given a chapter that begins with a narrative explanation outlining the meaning of each doctrine (“the Doctrinal Concept”); a Scripture passage to root each in the Bible; an explanation as to why the doctrine matters (“Why is this Doctrine Important?”); as well as pointers on preaching (“How Does it Preach?”) leading to a sample sermon. The sermons are a delight. McLean's exuberant, narrative style complements Young's more intellectual approach. The book begins with a strong demonstration of the relevance of the doctrine of God's sovereignty, touching down beautifully and pastorally in a hopeful funeral sermon for a woman who died of Alzheimer's. The set of doctrines employed is also unique in that it generally follows the Reformed pattern of the Basis of Union.² The chapters are peppered with quotations from each of our

¹ Anthony B. Robinson, *What's Theology Got to Do with It? Convictions, Vitality, and the Church* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006).

² There was little time in my seminary education devoted to the specific doctrinal

statements of faith, with a good many taken from the most recent *Song of Faith*. Here they demonstrate that even our most recent statement remains deeply rooted in the traditional teachings of the church. While these doctrines often become static, the authors make it clear that fresh language or perspective can help them come alive again.

One criticism, however, is that the authors occasionally shy away from more controversial doctrines. For example, the chapter on Atonement firmly settles on Jesus as Moral Exemplar. While it doesn't discount other models, it also doesn't explore them. Shying away from some forms of Substitutionary Atonement is understandable. Yet, Scripture witnesses to objective aspects of Christ's work on the cross, which may be ripe for the kind of retrieval at which they excel. Likewise, the notion that the "finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment" is discounted simply because "our beliefs have changed."³ While this statement may be true, it is helpful for us to articulate *why* we might discount certain doctrines for the sake of faithfulness other than the fact time has gone by.

In the end, though, these small issues remain small as the importance of doctrine once again looms large. As someone who has found himself drawn to ministry precisely because of the life-giving nature of the message and tradition, this book is a very welcome addition to my preaching library. In a denomination that is undergoing something of an identity crisis it is also a reminder that our roots run deeper than the last four decades. For this I thank God for the fresh approach of Catherine Faith McLean and John Young to the "practical wisdom" of our faith, and to telling the old, old story.

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teachings or tradition of the United Church. Much to my chagrin, I once had to sheepishly ask a Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisor (who was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church) just what the difference is between "regeneration" and "sanctification."

³ Ibid., 247.

The Operation of Grace: Further Essays on Art, Faith, and Mystery
Gregory Wolfe. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015. Pp.
xiv+207.

Like the 2003 *Intruding upon the Timeless: Meditations on Art, Faith, and Mystery*, this book is a collection of Gregory Wolfe's short, prefatory commentaries primarily for issues of the journal *Image*, a quarterly founded in 1989 "to demonstrate the continued vitality and diversity of contemporary art and literature that engage with the religious traditions of Western culture" (<https://imagejournal.org>). Divided into six thematic sections relating to reflections on art, faith, Christian humanism, and the literary life, the thirty-five pieces do not pretend to offer a unifying theme. Over roughly two hundred pages the reader encounters an author with eclectic interests, from the young man's passion for American Conservative politics in the 1980s to a fascination for European Renaissance literature, culture, and art. These short, suggestive writings value ambiguity in an exploration of the meeting places of the secular and the sacred.

The essays seek to place "art and faith in dialogue" (xii) and suggest a renewal "by reason and imagination" of the "Jewish and Christian roots of *our* culture" (43; emphasis added). These laudable, broad aims are belied by a surprisingly limited sense of audience. Although never clearly defined, the first person plural pronoun evident throughout the essays appears to be identical with Wolfe: North American (with emphasis on the latter), white, Christian, male, and well-educated. While such a focus may be appropriate for introductory essays in a magazine aimed at a known group of subscribers, a monograph should assume a broader audience. Because there is no editorial apparatus, the essays seem to address an in-crowd that shares the writer's interests and social location.

Allusive and wide-ranging, the essays' varied topics provoke the reader's curiosity: I found myself tracking down references and developing booklists as I went. For example, "The Cave and the Cathedral," traces Wolfe's reflections on the Werner Herzog documentary, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, about ancient cave art discovered in 1994 in the Ardèche region of southeastern France. But along the way Wolfe discusses Owen Barfield's history of humankind's participation in the mystery of nature and God, and applies these concepts to a short story by Flannery O'Connor. All in about 2,000 words. Sometimes the references are redolent of name-dropping, such as in the essay "Mugg, Hitch, and Me," a description of Wolfe's development through his relationships with Malcom Muggeridge and Christopher Hitchens. By contrast, a more focused and less personal

piece, “The Wound of Beauty,” argues powerfully for the importance of the beauty found in art which pierces reality with truth revealed in the brokenness of the cross.

Necessarily rooted in a specific time and place, the essays lack footnotes or endnotes identifying their original date of publication. This dislocation sometimes causes confusion. Repeated references to “the culture wars” and Cormac McCarthy’s *Border* trilogy assume the reader’s prior knowledge. The essay “Four Cultures” mentions “two presidential candidates this year” without giving either the year or the candidates’ names (192). As might be expected of a collection of occasional remarks covering a dozen years, the essays refer repetitively to the same sources such as Pope Benedict’s 1992 address at Fr. Luigi Guissani’s funeral or Paul Elie’s book on sacred and secular scripture. These are minor irritations, but problems arise when a non-academic style meets an academic purpose. In “Two-Way Traffic,” Wolfe takes issue with Ira Sadoff’s 2005 editorial in *The American Poetry Review*, deploring a perceived turn toward religion in poetry. Because Wolfe cites without documenting his rival’s words, the reader must take his comments on faith or go searching for Sadoff’s essay to make sense of the argument. Thus, an essay that with proper documentation could be understood as a well-balanced academic response becomes a polemical riposte. At the same time, in writing about the films *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Narnia Chronicles*, Wolfe remarks that anyone who fails to heed his warning against imbalance in Christian reading material is guilty of infantilism.

This book is best consumed a few essays at a time. They are like good dinner conversation for they stimulate further reading, investigation, and reflection, even as they sometimes vex the reader. Despite its narrowly-imagined audience, the book’s subject matter, the place of art in the mystery of faith, promotes thoughtful reflection for people interested in the connections between secular and sacred culture.

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Ethics: The Fundamental Questions of Our Lives**Wolfgang Huber. Georgetown University Press, 2015. Pp. 264.**

In this book, Wolfgang Huber, a German theologian and ethicist, discusses fundamental ethical questions raised from human lives today. For him, the human life story—from the very beginning (e.g., pregnancy and birth) to the last phase of life (e.g., aging and dying)—becomes the major subject of contemporary ethics. In each of the twenty chapters shaped by the significant stations of human life, he attempts to search for common and shared ethical principles through a dialogue between philosophical ethics and theological reflection.

Huber's arguments throughout the chapters are based on his particular anthropological perspectives: 1) humans as "relational and communicative beings" (221) living in relationship with others and being aware of their own responsibility for themselves and others; 2) the inviolable and equal dignity of every human being that obliges us to respect others and their freedom; and 3) humans as vulnerable and finite, and in need of help from others. In light of this understanding of human beings, human freedom as self-determination is inseparable from responsibility for the life of others. Therefore, human freedom is "a responsible and communicative freedom" rather than egocentric freedom (5).

An ethics of responsibility grounded on those perspectives can offer a more constructive approach to ethical issues today. For example, with regard to the influence of advanced life sciences on human life, Huber's discussion goes beyond the simplistic arguments between "pro-life" and "pro-choice," or between the "right to assisted dying" and the provision of care. As the pregnancy involves "an existential relationship" (33) binding a pregnant woman and an embryo together, the debate on abortion cannot separate one from the other. In case of conflict, the ethics of responsibility should take a more comprehensive ethical evaluation that takes into account various other aspects, such as societal distress that lead to the decision to have an abortion, the potential father's responsibility, the role of doctors and counsellors, and the institutional responsibility. In regard to assisted dying, Huber puts more emphasis on our moral obligation to prevent self-destructive choice and to provide proper care in accompanying and giving support (not only medical, but also personal and spiritual) to the dying person in the preparation for "dying according to human dignity" (214).

When it comes to the scope of “every human being,” Huber’s concern extends to the future generations. This point of view leads us to various issues surrounding environmental concerns, sustainability of human society, and our ethical concerns about the possible effect of today’s activities on those who come after us.

The ethics of responsibility also raises the fundamental question about the purpose of economic activity today. Huber asks “what is the economy for?” and reminds readers that the economy is an instrument for enhancing human life by overcoming poverty and promoting opportunities for fair development. In this respect, he supports the idea of the “social market economy” (117) and feels the urgency of regulating the financial market based on ethical perspective (127).

“How much differentness can we take?” (165) This may be one of the significant ethical questions today as we live in a world in which people of different cultures and of different convictions seem to be clashing with each other. Huber speaks of “tolerance based on convictions,” not on indifference or sufferance (170). It is the core of the Christian faith that all human beings—independent of differences in ethnicity, religion or conviction—are created in the image of God. This obliges us to respect the other’s freedom of conscience and conviction while taking our own conviction seriously. Then, how far can tolerance go? The author suggests the same principle of the equal dignity of all human beings as the boundary of tolerance. When the boundary is reached, one can repudiate another’s “attitudes and modes of conduct,” and this does not affect respect for the dignity of the people involved (171).

In conclusion, Huber raises concern that the “Jekyll and Hyde syndrome” (219) seems to be found in people today living in a world driven by economic competition and profit, the laws of the market, and self-interestedness. He calls for a profound shift of anthropological perspective from “the economic human, interested only in his or her own advantage, to the communicative human, interested in the relations with others and being aware of one’s own self-transcendence” (221).

This book is highly recommended for those who are searching for constructive ethical principles in the service to human life today. Huber’s thorough ethical analysis and theological reflections offer a foundation for a Christian ethics of responsibility on the basis of human nature as relational and communicative being.

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Dead Reckoning: The Six Phases of a Funeral**Michael K. Jones. Calgary: Vogelstein Press, 2015. Pp. 259**

Two generations ago, funerals were the normal cultural ritual in North America following a person's death. Today, a funeral is one of several options available to mark this inevitable life stage.

In *Dead Reckoning*, retired United Church of Canada minister Michael Jones writes amid this contemporary contextual reality. This practical, step-by-step guide to envisioning, planning, and leading funerals is another welcome addition to the growing body of literature on end-of-life topics that continues to emerge. At the outset, Jones acknowledges the rich resources currently available, but claims his work fills the void of translating theory into practice (5).

To accomplish his stated objective, Jones draws on his experience of conducting more than 100 funerals each year by attempting to capture, in detail, the entire process that surrounds human death and burial. To frame this exploration, he envisions six phases of a funeral: Planning and Preparation, Warm-Up, Inspiration, Eulogies and Tributes, Transition—The Message, and Closing Moves. A chapter is dedicated to each of the six phases, reflecting the chronological movement of a funeral from the perspective of the presider.

In a detailed presentation of his six phases, Jones covers many points in the planning and delivery of a funeral service that might otherwise be overlooked. Jones' premise is that careful attention to these matters helps free people to enter more deeply into the funeral experience. The chapters are peppered with examples of poems, readings and other resources the author has found helpful in his own contexts.

The writing attempts to consider a wide and diverse audience. Seasoned pastors and those who have never led a funeral will find many helpful suggestions for the task. Practical tips on an array of topics such as family meetings, the use of language around experiences of grief, and the so-called "open microphone" scenario at services are all addressed in helpful ways.

The six chapters on the phases conclude with "Closing Moves." Based on the conviction that "for many the reality and finality of the graveside experience forces fears and anxieties about death to the surface" (180), the author pays particular attention to helpful endings for funeral services. This reviewer appreciates the inclusion of many examples of final words and ritual acts, such as words to accompany seasons of the year. Some of these suggestions are, however, spoiled by confusion between the meaning of "commendation" and "committal." They are two separate acts,

each with their own respective accompanying words, rituals and place in the funeral service.

Immediately preceding the conclusion of the volume, Jones includes a chapter titled “Evaluation” that encourages self-reflection on every funeral service. He suggests that “there has to be something good, bad or different about each and every funeral we officiate” (211). While Jones does acknowledge that we are always invited to “identify our strengths and use them whenever we can” (201), the majority of this chapter seems to dwell in the learning that may result from due consideration of one’s weaknesses. This reviewer would have appreciated at least some acknowledgement that, from the Christian perspective, the “success” of all liturgy ultimately rests with the movement of the Holy Spirit in, around and through our human planning, words and acts. While it does seem that “God doesn’t need to be defended” at funerals (162), very often it is helpful and appropriate for God’s acts of grace, goodness and love to be named and claimed.

This concern is also reflected in a reading of the chapter on the meaning of “ritual,” where the author states, “In a funeral the drama is built around the history and legacy of the life of the deceased” (23). One wonders about the history and legacy of the faith that informs, inspires, and guides our experiences of death and loss that, in turn, take expression in the funeral service. The same chapter includes an extended portion about the value of story, but with little attention to the rich resources provided by the faith stories that have encouraged countless people through their experiences of loss and grief.

All in all, this book offers a uniquely Canadian perspective of a seasoned leader of funerals. There are learning and new discoveries here for anyone engaged in this very important aspect of ministry in our churches and communities.

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Do You Want to Write for *Touchstone*?

Touchstone welcomes submissions from new authors. Articles should be approximately 3000 words in length, and should be submitted at least three months before the publication date of a given theme. The three themes currently identified for 2018 are: 1968, Providence and Prayer, and Beauty

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