

# Journal *for* BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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‘Tell the Generations Following’:  
*A Festschrift* in Honor of  
Dr. Daniel Holcomb



# Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry

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## ‘Tell the Generations Following’: *A Festschrift* in Honor of Dr. Daniel Holcomb

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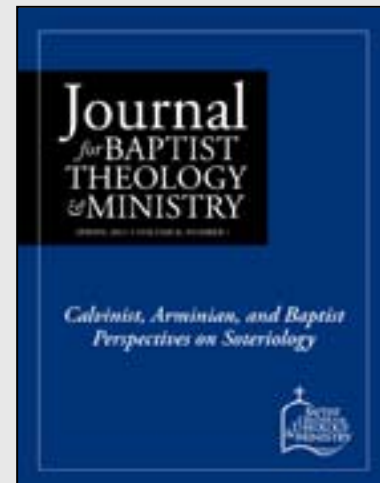
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# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: In Honor of Dan Holcomb



Steve W. Lemke, Ph.D.

*Dr. Lemke is Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, occupying the McFarland Chair of Theology, JBTM Executive Editor, and Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary*

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*“Walk about Zion, And go all around her. Count her towers; Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces; That you may tell it to the generations following” (Psalm 48:13)*

One of the responsibilities incumbent on each generation of God’s people is to share with the next generation what God has done among them. The Psalmist reminded the people of his day to tell the generations which followed about the great things God had done in Jerusalem. In the Christian world, we rely heavily on our church historians to remind us what God has done in His church in order to encourage the generations which follow. Dr. Daniel Holcomb is a Church Historian who has faithfully performed this task for many decades.

This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is a *festschrift* dedicated to the honor of Dr. Dan Holcomb, Senior Professor and John T. Westbrook Chair of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Each of the articles is contributed by a person who shares a deep appreciation for the contribution of Dan Holcomb. This issue of the *Journal* is being co-edited by two of Dan’s colleagues in the Church History department at NOBTS, Rex Butler and Lloyd Harsch. We express our appreciation for their assistance in helping make this *festschrift* possible.

When I became Provost at NOBTS in 1997, Dr. Dan Holcomb had already served for over twenty years on the faculty at NOBTS, and that was after serving another decade at Oklahoma Baptist University. In my fifteen years on the faculty, I have come to have great respect and appreciation for Dan Holcomb, both as the man and as a scholar. Allow me to share a few of the things we appreciate most about Dan.

First of all, Dan’s prayers are unforgettable. Dan prays with fervor, and yet each word is so aptly chosen that one might imagine that he spent half the day crafting the words that he voiced, even though you knew he was praying without prior notice. Even so, his prayers are not stiff and liturgical, but heartfelt and personal conversations with God.

Dan's sermons are equally eloquent. He is a wordsmith who paints each sentence richly with color and style. The sermons are works of art, works of a rhetoric often missing in contemporary preaching. The biblical and theological content of his messages are meaty and rich, not shallow and trite. His sermons consistently call for meaningful and sacrificial discipleship. He has been a frequent interim pastor in churches and a speaker in numerous spiritual retreat settings.

Third, Dan is an excellent teacher and lecturer. In his early teaching days, his rapid fire delivery and challenging tests earned him the nickname "Smoke'em Holcomb." And yet students marvel at his telling of church history. Among Dan's most popular classes has been a Devotional Classics course, which walks through the devotional classics in the life of the church, weaving theological and devotional threads in the lives of the students. His leadership in the faculty of NOBTS, especially as Division Chair of the Theological and Historical Studies Division, has made a tremendous contribution as well.

Not to be overlooked is Dan's excellent scholarship. In addition to several book publications, he was honored to present the Thomas F. Staley Lecture at William Carey College, the Herschel H. and Frances J. Hobbs Lecture at Oklahoma Baptist University, and the Eleanor and Nathaniel P. Phillips, Sr. Memorial Lecture at Newcomb College of Tulane University. He has been a visiting scholar at Yale University, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Oxford University, and Notre Dame Seminary.

We would not overlook the immensely supportive role that his wife Olga has played in Dan's ministry as well. She has been a strong supporter not only at home but also providing secretarial assistance in Dan's office for many years.

Of course, I am not alone in my appreciation for Dr. Holcomb. Each of the other contributors to this *festschrift* has been touched by his life, and it is in his honor that we dedicate this issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*. The first section focuses on Dan Holcomb, the man. It begins a curriculum vita outlining his academic achievements, followed by an article by Dr. Holcomb himself, addressing one of his specialties that was reflected in some of the classes for which he was famous at both the master's degree and Doctor of Ministry levels – Christian Devotional Classics. His article is entitled "The Classics of Christian Devotion: Wellsprings of Spiritual Renewal." Next, his son John, who serves as a well-known sports broadcaster in Tulsa, Oklahoma, shares his own personal recollections of his father in "Dr. Dad," particularly about his love for sports. In addition to serving as a Sports Director for a Tulsa television channel, John is an announcer for Oklahoma State University football and basketball broadcasts, and has twice been named Oklahoma Sportscaster of the Year. Brief reminiscences of some of Dan's faculty colleagues follow next – including NOBTS President Chuck Kelley, NOBTS Graduate Dean Jerry Barlow, Associate Graduate Dean Michael Edens, and Regional Associate Dean Peter Kendrick. Each of these men has known Dan as students and as faculty colleagues. The section concludes with a cartoon about Dr. Holcomb

by Joe McKeever, and a poem in Dr. Holcomb's honor as a personal reflection written by Mr. Clay Corvin, who as Vice President for Business Affairs has served with Dan for 30 years at NOBTS.

In the second section, we have a collection of articles on Dr. Holcomb's primary discipline — Church History. Rex Butler, Dr. Holcomb's colleague in the Church History department at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary since 2007 as Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics, has contributed an article entitled, "Tertullianism: Tertullian's Vision of the New Prophecy in North Africa." James Roberts, a recent Ph.D. graduate who majored in Church History at NOBTS where he was mentored by Dr. Holcomb, has contributed an article on "The Life of Pelagius." Pelagius was one of the major topics in Roberts' dissertation research. Lloyd Harsch, who serves as Associate Professor of Church History at NOBTS, occupying the Cooperative Program Chair of SBC Studies and serving as Director for the Institute for Faith and the Public Square, has served as Dr. Holcomb's colleague in the Church History department at NOBTS since 2000. Harsch has contributed an article on "The Brethren of the Common Life." Carol Holcomb, Dr. Holcomb's daughter-in-law, who serves as Professor of Church History and Baptist Studies in the College of Christian Studies at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, has provided an article on "Plan Not for the Year, but for the Years': Fannie Exile Scudder Heck and Southern Baptist Progressivism." Carol has served as President of Baptist History and Heritage Society, the Fellowship of Baptist Historians, and the Texas Baptist Historical Society. Finally, Denis Janz, the Provost Distinguished Chair of the History of Christianity at Loyola University in New Orleans, has contributed an article on historiography entitled, "Invitation to the New Church History." Janz's interest in historiography is shared by Dr. Holcomb, and was the subject of Holcomb's doctoral dissertation.

The articles in the third section address another area of Dr. Holcomb's interest and teaching — the interaction of Theology and culture. J. Terry Young, a Professor Emeritus of Theology at NOBTS who served as a colleague with Dr. Holcomb for many years, has contributed a thoughtful article on "Baptists and the Priesthood of Believers." Dr. Holcomb's son J. David Holcomb (and Carol's husband), who serves as Associate Professor of History and Political Science at the College of Humanities of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, has contributed an article entitled, "Baptists, Anti-Catholicism, and Religious Liberty." David serves as the Director of the Honors Program at the university, as well as Associate Director of the Center for Religious Liberty. G. Ellis Sandoz, the Hermann Moyse, Jr. Distinguished Chair of Political Science and Director of the Eric Voegelin Institute for American Renaissance Studies at Louisiana State University, has contributed an article on "Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805." A specialist in political philosophy and constitutionalism, Dr. Sandoz has had a distinguished career, including authoring thirteen books. Dr. Sandoz interacted with Dr. Holcomb while Dan was serving as interim Pastor at University Baptist Church in Baton Rouge. A. Ronald Tonks, a retired History professor from Middle Tennessee State University who has authored several books on agencies of the



Southern Baptist Convention, has contributed an article on the twentieth century literature that is another of Dr. Holcomb's areas of expertise. Dr. Tonks was a doctoral colleague of Dr. Holcomb at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Tonks' article is entitled "The Meaning of Life in the Writings of John Steinbeck." Finally, Warren McWilliams, who taught in the Religion department at Oklahoma Baptist University as a colleague of Dr. Holcomb, has contributed an article entitled, "You Feckless Thug': Protest Theodicy on the 'West Wing' Television Series." Dr. McWilliams has authored six books and numerous articles, and serves as Auguie Henry Professor of Bible at OBU. This section on Theology and culture concludes with three poems by William Mitchell, Professor Emeritus at Oklahoma Baptist University, where he also was a colleague of Dr. Holcomb. These poems were drawn from Dr. Mitchell's book, *Voices of the Advent and Other Voices*. Following this third section are some helpful book reviews on a variety of topics.

We are grateful for the life and ministry of Dan Holcomb, and hope that this *festschrift* in some small way expresses our appreciation and admiration for him and the contribution he has made to the lives of thousands of students and dozens of churches through his teaching and preaching ministry. We are all richer for having known Dan Holcomb.

PART I

**ABOUT DAN HOLCOMB**



*'A good name is to be chosen  
rather than great riches'*

Proverbs 22:1



Daniel H. Holcomb, PhD  
Senior Professor of Church History  
New Orleans Baptist  
Theological Seminary

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**Education**

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**Visiting Scholar – Vanderbilt University Divinity School, 1993**

Areas of Study: The Radical Reformation (Richard Harrison), History of Modern Christianity (Dale Johnson), Recent and Contemporary European Philosophy of Religion (Edward Farley)

**Visiting Scholar – Oxford University, 1992**

Areas of Study: Philosophy of Religion (Richard Swinburne, University College), Protestant Reformation (Alistair McGrath, Wycliffe Hall), Origen (Timothy Ware, Pembroke), Sociology of Religion (Brian Wilson, All Souls), Modern Theology (Keith Ward, University College)

**Research Fellow – Yale University, 1986**

Areas of Study: Medieval Spirituality (Julia Gatta), The Philosophy of Symbol and Myth (Louis Dupre), The Historian and the Believer (John Stroup), Popular Religion in Europe and America (Jon Butler)

**Visiting Scholar – Notre Dame Seminary (Archdiocese of New Orleans) – 1985**

Areas of Study: Roman Catholic Spirituality (Warren Dicharry) and Theological Method (Terry Tekippe)

**Th.D. – The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1969**

Major: Church History, Minor: Philosophy of Religion. Doctoral Dissertation: “The New Church History: The Quest of a Dialogic Approach in American Protestantism Since 1945”

**Th.M. – The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1963**

Major: Church History. Thesis: “The Theology of Henry B. Smith (1815-1877): With Special Reference to Contemporary Influences”

**B.D. – New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959**

Concentration: Church History

**B.A. – University of Southern Mississippi, 1957**

Major: American and European History

**B.A. – Mississippi College, 1954**

Major: Bible, Minors: English and History

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## Teaching Experience

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### **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**

1994-present – John T. Westbrook Professor of Church History  
1994-2009 – Chairman, Division of Theological and Historical Studies  
1989-1994 – Professor of Church History  
1979-1989 – Associate Professor of Church History

### **Leavell College**

1995-present – Adjunct Professor - World History

### **William Carey College**

1988-1991 – Adjunct Professor - History, Philosophy

### **Oklahoma Baptist University**

1974-1979 – Associate Professor of Religion  
1969-1974 – Assistant Professor of Religion

### **The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

1965-1967 – Instructor in Church History

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## Teaching Specializations

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Early Christianity  
The Radical Reformation  
Christian Spirituality  
Theory and Method of Church History

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## Ministry Experience

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Extensive experience as pastor, interim pastor, supply minister, revival speaker, conference and retreat leader.  
Preached/taught in churches in AL, AZ, FL, KY, LA, MS, MO, OK, SC, TX, VA.  
Conferences and Retreats (Windemere, MO; Gulfshore, MS; Falls Creek, OK; Eagle Eyrie, VA; Ridgecrest, NC; Glorieta, NM)

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## Publications

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### **Books**

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*Costly Commitment*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1978.  
*Our Heritage of Faith*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1983.  
*Readings in Baptist History*. Compiler and editor, Privately printed, 1986.  
“The Doctrine of Salvation and the Support of Missions.” In *Mission Unlimited: Biblical and Doctrinal Foundation of Support of Missions*. Ed. Morris Ashcraft, 259-91. Nashville, TN: Stewardship Commission of the SBC, 1976.

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**Books in preparation**

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*Disturbing Grace*

*No Escape: What to Do When You Have to Take Church History*

*The Recovery of Excellence*

*C. Penrose St. Amant: Celebration of a Legacy* (6 vols.)

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**Lectureships**

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Thomas F. Staley Lecturer, William Carey College, Hattiesburg, MS, April 16-18, 1990;  
Theme: The Baptist Heritage of Freedom; Lectures: "The Travail of Religious Freedom";  
"Advocates of Freedom"; "Religious Freedom: A Baptist Rationale"

Herschel H. and Frances J. Hobbs Lecturer, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, OK,  
October 29, 1997; Lecture: "The Classics of Christian Devotion: Wellsprings of  
Southern Baptist Renewal"

The Eleanor and Nathaniel P. Phillips, Sr. Memorial Lecturer, Tulane University, New Orleans,  
LA, April 16, 1998; Lecture: "Images of God in Contemporary Literature"

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**Professional Organizations**

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Omicron Delta Kappa

American Academy of Religion

American Society of Church History

Conference on Faith and History

Southern Baptist Historical Society

College Theology Society

# THE CLASSICS OF CHRISTIAN DEVOTION: WELLSPRINGS OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



By Daniel H. Holcomb

*Senior Professor of Church History  
at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary*

In the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains is an old church, St. George's-by-the-Vineyard, that holds title to an extraordinary vineyard. Over the years, natives claim, the vineyard has produced the most delicious grapes in that region. And they insist that the wine made from the grapes is unsurpassed in quality. No one was able to account for the excellence of the vineyard until old Jeremy, the church sexton, died. A taciturn man, he had faithfully and unobtrusively cared for the church properties. After his death, church officials found a note stating simply, "The key to everything is under the altar." Under the altar they discovered not only a key but also a moveable stone slab and stairs leading down into a cellar. Exploring the dark crypt they were surprised to find a gurgling spring beside which was a chart and a time schedule. Unknown to anyone else the sexton at regular intervals had been releasing the waters of the spring into the ducts that irrigated the vineyard. That was the secret of its amazing productivity--a hidden source of nurture regularly released by a wise and faithful keeper of the spring.<sup>1</sup>

A host of witnesses, saints past and present, invite contemporary pilgrims to the wellsprings of the spirit, the sources of spiritual renewal hidden from the arrogant and self-sufficient but accessible to sincere seekers after faith, to those who truly thirst for the living God. Among these witnesses is a body of extraordinary mentors, faithful sextons of the spirit--Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas A Kempis, John of the Cross, Blaise Pascal, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, William Law, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Thomas Kelly, to name a few--who provide wise and vital counsel for those who long for a life of faith that is "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."<sup>2</sup> Their spiritual legacy includes a rich vein of writings--autobiographies, biographies, confessions, journals, allegories, theological reflections, letters of spiritual counsel, manuals of spiritual discipline, guides for private worship--recognized as classics of Christian devotion.

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<sup>1</sup>Vernon Grounds, *Radical Commitment* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1984), 86-87.

<sup>2</sup>Jn. 4:14. All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

These works fall within the range of pastoral or practical theology because their didactic intent is more existential and formational than academic and informational. They are devotional: they speak to the heart about the fundamental issues of human existence. They call the reader to the love, worship and service of God and to those disciplines that contribute to clarity of vision, probity of character, and steadfastness of purpose. These writings have earned the status of classics because of their distinctive quality and enduring relevance. Although they represent a wide variety of authors, literary types, and approaches to the spiritual life, they all convey an authenticity of response to God that rings true to human experience in any age. In this essay I shall identify some of these works and discuss their distinctive contributions to Christian spirituality.

### An Expansive Vision

An architect recently suggested that no public building should have ceilings over twelve feet high. High vaulted ceilings, he said, give modern man an inferiority complex, and to avoid this, man must keep his ceilings low. Happily, there is no indication that this proposal has taken the architectural profession by storm, but some of our current philosophies function as if it were their operational norm. Although there are encouraging signs to the contrary, for Western philosophy in general it is a time of low ceilings and limited vision. Forsaking their classical vocation of probing the abiding issues of human existence against the horizon of transcendence, philosophers are inclined toward myopic specialties and lured by ideology. Driving forces are doctrinaire rationalism and empiricism, offspring of the Enlightenment and dominant shapers of modern Western thought. Because of their restrictive understanding of reason and experience, these two movements have had a devastating impact on religion. They have summarily vitiated the mythic, the symbolic, and the liturgical, thus showing little respect for mystery either by radically reducing its role or by denying altogether its reality. Contemporary man has considerable philosophical encouragement to compress and edit his life, paint himself into an existential corner, refuse to let his reach exceed his grasp.

The essential challenge is reductionism, which psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl calls the “true nihilism of today.” No longer brandishing the word “nothingness,” contemporary nihilism, he says, is “camouflaged as nothing-but-ness.”<sup>3</sup> Man is nothing but “a complex biochemical mechanism powered by a combustion system which energizes computers with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information.”<sup>4</sup> A baby’s tiny hand is nothing but “an outer ectofermal epidermis layer which covers connective tissue, bone structure, and is richly supplied by blood

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<sup>3</sup>As cited by E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 5-6.

<sup>4</sup>As cited by Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unconscious God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 92.

vessels.”<sup>5</sup> Values are nothing but “homeostatic restraints in a stimulus--response process.”<sup>6</sup> Violin music is nothing but vibrations caused by horse hair rubbing catgut. God is nothing but a projection of the religious imagination.

In striking contrast, the classics of Christian devotion provide a comprehensive and richly textured understanding of reality that calls the reader beyond a “nothing but” to a “this and much more” perspective. They envision the universe as a created order graced with a surplus of meaning that overflows the boundaries of rationalism and empiricism, an order enfolded and penetrated by transcendent mystery, where human life is transfigured by the holy, where in surprising moments of grace we are enabled to discern eternal purposes in ordinary circumstances. In such a universe the quest for understanding, as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and Bonaventure (1217-1274) taught, must include faith and love as well as reason. Faith, the presupposition and inspiration of reason, points reason to its divine archetype, the eternal Word and Wisdom. This orientation gives reason a constructive and confessional role rather than restricting it to dialectical technique. Faith and reason are brought into a creative partnership enriched and disciplined by holy love. It is a grand and demanding vision.

Guided by and contributing significantly to this orientation, Blaise Pascal (1632-1662), brilliant mathematician and scientist, author of the classic *Pensées*, lived and wrought. His brief sojourn was set within the dawn of the Age of Reason and its grandiose claims for the centrality and power of rational thought. But Pascal the man of science was also a man of vision who discerned the way of reason and the way beyond reason, the matters of the mind and the habits of the heart. The compelling insights of the *Pensées* reflect a mind acutely sensitive to the vastness and complexity of the universe, the splendors and enigmas of the natural order, the towering and fragile nature of man, and the paradoxes of grace. Pascal’s voice blends with a large chorus of witnesses who confess: OMNIA EXEUNT IN MYSTERIUM--all things pass into mystery.<sup>7</sup>

## The Divine Presence

The devotional writers press the issue of transcendence beyond the limits of philosophical discourse to the deepest levels of theological reflection and religious experience. They dare to utter the unutterable, to name the Ground and Source of transcendence, the Mystery beyond the mystery, the God above the gods, and establish a vital relationship with him. In concert they testify that in relentless love God--the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ--had broken through to their consciousness, shaken them to the very

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<sup>5</sup>As cited by William P. Clemmons, “Awe: Foundation of Faith and Mission,” *Faith and Mission*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 1983), 28.

<sup>6</sup>Frankl, 93.

<sup>7</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Martin Turnell (London: Harvill, 1962), 7-28.



foundation of their being, and filled them with wonder, awe, and holy fear (Ehrfurcht). They experienced what Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* called the “mysterium tremendum et fascinans,” a combination of dread and fascination in the presence of a holy majestic, omnipotent God.<sup>8</sup>

Awe reinforced in their consciousness the otherness and incomparability of God; certified the createdness, reality, and trustworthiness of the universe; clarified the limits and potential of their humanity; and initiated their sense of calling as stewards of the mysteries of creation and grace. In awe they beheld a magnificent creation declaring the glory of God, and in awe they beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Nurtured and inspired by redeeming grace, their awe breaks forth as wonder, love, and praise. All that is within them blesses God’s holy name.

With the Old Testament psalmists, these authors affirm that the Lord God is “most high over all the earth” and “exalted far above all gods”<sup>9</sup> yet immediately present to all his creation.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.<sup>10</sup>

So Augustine describes God as “most hidden yet most present.” To Bernard of Clairvaux, God is the inexhaustible one intimately and lovingly related to his creation. Meister Eckhart (1260-1329), German Dominican mystic, speaks of God dwelling “where our depths lie.” In his brief written legacy, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Nicholas Herman (1611-1691), known as Brother Lawrence, combines a lofty conception of God with a sense of God’s presence within each person. The Journal of George Fox (1624-1691), founder of the Society of Friends, advocates a simple, practical piety nurtured by intimate communion with the God at hand and within. The thought of Scottish theologian John Baillie (1886-1960) bears the marks of ancient Celtic spirituality with its intense awareness of the immediacy of God. His major theological works, *Our Knowledge of God* and *The Sense of the Presence of God*, reflect a devotion to Holy Scripture joined with an insightful advocacy of general revelation and direct, rather than inferential, knowledge of God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1990-1960* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 213-16.

<sup>9</sup>Ps. 97:9.

<sup>10</sup>Ps. 139:7.

<sup>11</sup>John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959); *The Sense of the Presence of God* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962); also *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

## Life at the Center

Spiritual mentors from the Desert Fathers to contemporary Quaker writers have addressed the psychological and practical dimensions of *sapientia experimentalis*, the experience of the presence of God. The sense of God's presence is nurtured by a disciplined devotion, by obedient attentiveness to his will, by graduating from self-centeredness and thing-centeredness to God-centeredness. In this way alone is human life simplified and integrated.

The Desert Fathers are exceptional examples of this quality of commitment. Antony, Athanasius, Origen, Pachomias, Evagrius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and others produced a literature of spiritual renewal that is still compelling because it reflects their firsthand engagement of the disciplines of the desert. They reduced their material needs to the bare essentials of water, food, and shelter. They learned to be silent, to listen, to reflect, to meditate, and to pray. They struggled to detach themselves from idolatry, especially the idolatry of the first personal pronoun. They cleaved to God for his sake, not for any benefit they hoped to receive from him, knowing that their most fundamental need was to need him more. Their lives thus communicated a simplicity, clarity, calm assurance, and steadfastness that scandalized the skewed values of their world. Their pilgrimage authenticates Francois Fenelon's declaration, "Desire nothing but God: seek for nothing but God: and you shall taste of peace: you shall taste it in defiance of the world."<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent Christian spirituality is an extended commentary on the principle of God-centered simplicity practiced by the Desert Fathers. The famous English classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, composed in the period 1345-1386, teaches that a person escapes an egocentric existence only by a naked intent toward God, by a willingness to confess, "Him I covet, him I seek, and nothing but him."<sup>13</sup> An example of the apophatic or negative theology of Denys the Areopagite, the *Cloud* counsels the contemplative to negate, to put behind in the cloud of forgetting, all sensual or intellectual preoccupations that impede a purely affective and intuitive impulse toward God. The cloud of unknowing that veils God's presence can be pierced only by a "sharp dart of longing love."<sup>14</sup> *The Theologia Germanica* (c. 1350), highly regarded by Martin Luther, teaches, "All concerns about the I, Mine, self, and things connected with them must be utterly lost and surrendered, except, of course, the traits that are necessary for our existence as persons."<sup>15</sup> Eternal bliss or blessedness comes not from "the wealth of things" but is "rooted in

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<sup>12</sup>Francois Fenelon, *Pious Reflections*, The Seventeenth Day, as cited by Patrick Grant, ed., *A Dazzling Darkness: An Anthology of Western Mysticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 132.

<sup>13</sup>James Walsh, S. J., ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 131.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Bengt Hoffman, trans., *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 127.

God alone.”<sup>16</sup> Francis Quarles’ lines capture the thrust of this commitment:

In having all things, and not Thee, what have I?  
Not having Thee what have my labors got?  
Let me enjoy but Thee, what further crave I?  
And having Thee alone, what have I not?  
I wish nor sea nor land; nor would I be  
Possess’d of heaven, heaven unpossess’d of Thee.<sup>17</sup>

This radical simplification of life contrasts sharply with the current “passion to possess.” Richard Foster, in *Freedom of Simplicity*, observes that “the lust for affluence in contemporary society has become psychotic: it has completely lost touch with reality.”<sup>18</sup> This lust is legitimized by the entitlement theology of popular piety that reduces God to an instrumental value invoked for self-aggrandizing purposes, usually to enhance and protect one’s kingdom of stuff, as parodied by the following yuppie’s prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep  
I pray my Cuisinart to keep  
I pray my stocks are on the rise  
And that my analyst is wise  
That all the wine I sip is white  
And that my hot tub’s watertight  
That racquetball won’t get too tough  
That all my sushi’s fresh enough  
I pray my cordless phone still works  
That my career won’t lose its perks  
My microwave won’t radiate  
My condo won’t depreciate  
I pray my health club doesn’t close  
And that my money market grows  
If I go broke before I wake  
I pray my Volvo they won’t take.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>17</sup>James Douglas Robertson, comp. and ed., *Handbook of Preaching Resources from English Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 74.

<sup>18</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 3.

<sup>19</sup>John A. Bernbaum and Simon M. Steer, *Why Work?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 44-45.

When Augustine in the *Confessions* testified that he collected himself from the dispersion to which he had given himself when he committed himself to the One, he bore witness to “the uniqueness of singularity” in biblical faith.<sup>20</sup> God is one, not many, and commands from each of his children a supreme and controlling loyalty: one Vision that informs all other visions, one Relationship that enhances all other relationships, one Allegiance before which all other allegiances bow. In this way alone God invests human life with integrity and wholeness. A forceful exposition of this theme is *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The book is a commentary on James 4:8--“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind.” Intending to rouse Christendom from its spiritual slumber and reintroduce it to Christianity, Kierkegaard calls for a decisive, personal faith. To live is to decide, to stand as a “solitary individual” before God and to will one thing. To will *one* thing is not to will *any* thing. God alone must be willed for he alone is the unifying reality. Purity of heart--integrity and wholeness--comes only to those who will God, who commit themselves unreservedly to him. To desire other than God or to desire God from unworthy motives is not to will one thing but “a multiple of things, a dispersion, the toy of changeableness, and the prey of corruption!”<sup>21</sup>

Quaker spirituality understands personal wholeness to be the result of faithful abiding at the “Divine Center” and unconditional yielding to “the Light Within.” In *A Testament of Devotion*, the Quaker author Thomas Kelly (1893-1941) writes,

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center . . . to which we may continuously return. . . . It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men.<sup>22</sup>

At the “deep Center of living” one finds serenity and power, integration of life’s “fretful calls,” and the capacity to say “No as well as Yes” with confidence.<sup>23</sup>

### Intense Ordinariness

Patrick Grant’s term “intense ordinariness” describes a spirituality characterized by “a steady

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<sup>20</sup>Elton Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), 12.

<sup>21</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 29.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), 29.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 115-16.

attitude of attentive wonder.”<sup>24</sup> It is grounded in the conviction that the presence of God is indissolubly linked with the routine, the ordinary, the mundane. Every moment, experience, or thing thus is vested with infinite richness and potential. *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence is an example of this kind of spirituality. A humble Carmelite monk, the author cultivated an intimate moment by moment awareness of God’s presence, in his words a “simple attentiveness, an habitual, loving turning of my eyes to God.”<sup>25</sup> His heart became a chapel, his worship unfettered by rules or special forms. His work in the monastery kitchen taught him to do small tasks faithfully for the pure love of God. This is a spirituality of the immediate moment and the nearest task at hand, a spirituality that is steady and vitally related to daily existence.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, the French Jesuit priest and teacher Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751) in his book *Abandonment to Divine Providence* understands the “essence of spirituality” to be a “complete and utter abandonment to the will of God.” Abandonment is not simple acceptance or resignation.

It is that giving of oneself to God in which one wishes to do his will whatever the situation and at the same time not only accepts the situation as the current context for this but actively wills it, as it were endorses it, since faith interprets it not as mere happenings but as divine providence.<sup>27</sup>

God’s presence is veiled in each moment and the lowliest things. Faith discerns that presence and thus “the simplest sermons, the most commonplace conversations, and the least high-toned books become . . . sources of knowledge and of wisdom.” Those abandoned to God “carefully gather up the crumbs that skeptics trample underfoot. Everything is precious in their eyes, everything enriches them.”<sup>28</sup>

## Contemplation and the Social Order

“Christian contemplation,” according to Kenneth Leech, “is concerned with unmasking illusion, with attaining clarity of vision. It can never be an alternative to Christian action; it is,

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<sup>24</sup>Grant, ed., 155.

<sup>25</sup>Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. E. M. Blaiklock (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 45.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 23, 28, 29, 41, 42.

<sup>27</sup>J. Neville Ward, “Abandon,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 2.

<sup>28</sup>Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, as cited by Grant, 157.

rather, its lifeblood and its constant companion.”<sup>29</sup> Thomas Kelly maintains that an ethically mature spirituality provides a “light for the marketplace, a guide for perplexed feet, a recreator of culture-patterns for the race of men.”<sup>30</sup> The *Life of God in the Soul of Man* by Henry Scougal (1650-1678), “Aberdeen’s immortal mystic,” represents an ethical mysticism that challenges the reader to live the Christian graces and the principles of the kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> John Woolman’s *Journal* and *A Plea for the Poor* provide glimpses of the warm piety, simple lifestyle, and social concern of an eighteenth century Quaker whose remarkable itinerant ministry was a major influence in eliminating black slavery among the Quakers in the American colonies.<sup>32</sup> *Real Christianity* by William Wilberforce (1759-1833) is a vigorous statement of evangelical principles by an English Parliamentarian committed to “the abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.”<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Inundated with “easy believism”<sup>34</sup> and beguiled by “the illusion of technique,”<sup>35</sup> contemporary American Christianity needs a fresh encounter with the devotional classics. When cultural values are reduced to the measurable and quantifiable, churches are driven to translate faithfulness as “efficiency” and “success.” Preoccupied with functional and instrumental priorities, ministers become purveyors of a sharper image “Aqua Velva faith and Perma-Prest certainty”<sup>36</sup> that transforms the thickness of glory into slick slogans and reduces the deep currents of faith to easily negotiable puddles. Thus does the church herald forth an orchestrated transcendence, a

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<sup>29</sup>Kenneth Leech, “The Soul and the Social Order,” *Weavings*, vol. 1, no. 2 (November/December 1986), 11.

<sup>30</sup>Kelly, 31.

<sup>31</sup>Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (Nashville: Upper Room, 1962), 4-8.

<sup>32</sup>John Woolman, *The Journal and Other Writings*, Introduction by Vida D. Scudder (Everyman’s Library, No. 42; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1952), vii-xix.

<sup>33</sup>William Wilberforce, *Real Christianity*, ed. James Houston (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), xxvii. See also xv-xxix, 113-31.

<sup>34</sup>See Gary R. Collins, *Beyond Easy Believism* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 17-29.

<sup>35</sup>See William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), xi-xxii.

<sup>36</sup>Suzanne Britt, “Aqua Velva Faith and Perma-Prest Certainty,” *Books and Religion*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 4.

processed spirituality, that produces busy and shallow hothouse saints who stare unblinkingly at the Light. Such religion is bogus, its broken cisterns hold no life-giving water to slake the thirst of contemporary seekers. The classics of Christian devotion call us to put aside our empty idolatries and return to “the fountain of living waters.”<sup>37</sup> This alone is the way to spiritual renewal.

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<sup>37</sup>Jer. 2:11-13.

# DR. DAD



By John Holcomb

*John Holcomb, Dan and Olga's firstborn son,  
is the Sports Director at KOTV in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

In the summer of 1978, Dad wrote a book that was used as the main teaching tool for thousands of young students at Falls Creek, the Baptist camp in Oklahoma. The week our youth group attended, Dad was there as the teacher. I don't know how many other kids remember the impact that week had on their lives, but it helped shape my life forever. I look back at that week and see clearly what Dad stands for, and some of what he has enjoyed for a long time.

There are several things that are impossible to miss when you spend any amount of time around our Dad. One is his love for God, followed closely by his love for our Mom. There is also his deep interest in Christianity, from how it all began to how it is promoted, reviewed, and received today. Sharing those views while reinforcing what the Bible teaches is his life's work. Whether it's the classroom or a pulpit, he's completely at home.

Another obvious thing about Dad? He has a passion for sports, specifically (and not just coincidentally) the Saints. For those not quite indoctrinated to south Louisiana culture, we're talking about the New Orleans Saints, not exclusive to Dad's rooting interest, but definitely at the top of the list.

To trace Dad's love for sports, you have to go a long way back, to his childhood. The son of an Army veteran who served during both world wars, Dad and his father and mother bounced from San Antonio to Rockford, Illinois, to Seattle, some of that time spent on Army bases like Fort Lawton in the early years of World War II. As a kid Dad balanced the unnerving uncertainty of conflict with trips to the ballpark, watching favorite players like future major league first baseman Earl Torgeson.

One of my earliest memories is of a trip to Freedom Hall in Louisville. Dad took us there to watch the Louisville Cardinals play. I don't remember the opponent. I do remember him telling me about big Wes Unseld and Butch Beard, two of the Cardinals' stars. I also remember standing in line that evening to get Kentucky great Cliff Hagan's autograph. I think I was 3 years old.

Basketball became a big part of our lives from that point. Dad helped coach our teams when I was in grade school. I'm sure finding a more intricate playbook than the one Dad put together for our 4th grade YMCA league team in Shawnee would be an impossible task. It was a 3-ring binder full of basic defenses and offenses, but also with situational plays. How many other teams



that age had end-of-game half-court inbounds plays drawn up? Full-court zone presses?

Dad's passion for Oklahoma Baptist University basketball was unmistakable. Many a fall afternoon was spent with his colleague, Dr. James Timberlake, walking to Braum's Ice Cream Shoppe for a Black-and-White sundae and then to old Clark Craig Fieldhouse to watch the Bison practice. We rarely missed an OBU game. There were blowouts and close calls, but one vivid memory from that time came after a game. As kids, my brother and I would look forward to playing in impromptu pick-up games after the real contest was over. On this particular night OBU pulled out a last-second win, but before we could head down to the court, Dad stopped us. He simply wanted to check our heartbeats. He calmed us down, just a bit, and then we were on our way. I've wondered over the years exactly why he did that. What I've found is that when things have become stressful, when deadlines are closing in, when situations seem to be exploding moments before I have to talk about them, I stop for a moment and breathe.

During one season Dad was asked to be the public address announcer for OBU games. I loved it because there was usually a seat right next to him at courtside where I could join him. Not a better one in the house.

During the second half of one game with a rival school Dad was announcing who was shooting free throws. It was for the opposing team, and he'd waited a bit until the noise subsided before delivering the news. Except that he waited a bit too late. I remember being terrified for a second because Dad was talking while the player was about to shoot. Back then, it felt like a really big deal. Thankfully, it wasn't. He took that job seriously.

It was around that time, when I was in eighth grade, that I was suffering (like everyone else on the team) through difficult holiday practices. I was playing on the ninth-grade team and I remember telling Dad one night that I wasn't sure I could handle it anymore, that I wanted to play for the eighth grade team. Dad gently told me that if that's what I really wanted to do that would be okay but to sleep on it and give it a little more thought. I stayed with the ninth graders and have never forgotten how Dad understood and let me work it out without telling me what I should or shouldn't do.

Of course, Dad's limits were tested on occasion. My own appetite for sports may have exceeded his at an early age. I remember bugging Dad so much about something football-related one year around Christmas that he finally said "I don't want to talk with you about sports for twenty-four hours." Being an obedient son, I immediately checked the clock. So at precisely 3:00 p.m. the following day I found Dad and asked who he thought would win the Sugar Bowl. He smiled.

I remember watching Dad play for the faculty softball team at OBU not long after we moved to Shawnee. To say he was out in left field isn't speaking metaphorically; it was a fact. Dad was a good player, dating back to his days as a teenager on the American Legion baseball team in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Dad never pitched, but he did teach me a looping, roundhouse

curveball. The one time I came on in relief in a high school game I used it to get an unexpected strikeout.

In the summer of 1974, we took a family trip to Arlington, Texas. Six Flags and Rangers baseball. Mom must have been thrilled. The Rangers were hosting the two-time defending World Series champs, the Oakland A's. We had good seats, and Dad helped my brother and me with keeping score. Afterward Dad took us down to where the A's would come out of their clubhouse and get onto their bus. One by one we picked off these baseball heroes, getting autographs as our nervous excitement turned into a sense of accomplishment.

Then the great Reggie Jackson walked out carrying a Dr. Pepper in one hand and a briefcase in the other, and despite our entreaties, never looked at or acknowledged us.

Talk about a teachable moment.

There are a lot of fathers who would be upset, who might say things out of anger or react as if an injustice had occurred, and they might have a good reason to. Dad chose to remind us that sometimes people don't act or respond the way you expect. He also reminded us of how other players like Vida Blue, Bert Campaneris, and Joe Rudi (my brother's favorite player) stopped for us. The A's went on to win their third straight World Series title that fall. I don't remember much about how they beat the Los Angeles Dodgers for the championship, but I've never forgotten the power of a few moments of recognition from athletes we had admired from a distance.

There's another story from the "sometimes people don't act the way you expect" file. Back at one of those OBU post-game kid contests, my brother Dave and I and several others weren't getting the ball much. Some of the older kids were dominating the action. Dad saw what was going on, and tried to help. One of the kids told him to "shut up." I'm sure my jaw dropped. Everything got quiet for a few seconds. Dad had every right to set this kid straight, but instead calmly made his point before letting us all solve the problem. I know my Dad, and even though we haven't spoken about it much, I know he had to be boiling inside.

Dad's passion was more evident during my high-school basketball years. There was the time when we were playing one of our rivals, Newman High, in New Orleans, when I was blindsided by a pick. It looked worse than it was, but Dad started to come down to the edge of the floor from his seat in the stands. Mom had no chance of stopping him. There was also my last high-school game, in the playoffs, when perhaps the officiating could have been deemed questionable in favor of our opponent. Nothing questionable about it to Dad, though. Let's just say the refs knew where he was. I knew Dad wanted us to win as much or more than we did. That kind of support can provide an incredible boost of confidence.

Dad's love of sports extended at times to perhaps influencing purchases. It may not have been the deciding factor, but I remember a time when Dad bought a car from a dealership

in New Orleans where Saints quarterback Archie Manning happened to work part-time. Thankfully, the car's reliability and longevity somewhat matched that of Manning's career.

You can't celebrate Dad without praising our Mom. She was also a longtime teacher, dealing with the emotional swings of junior-high and high-school students while taking care of all the things at home that so often go unnoticed. I don't really know if Mom was a big sports fan before she met Dad, but she has willingly gone for the ride over the years through hundreds of games, many involving my brother and me. She has been a fan with a balanced perspective, not willing to let the emotions of a contest get in the way. I'll bet that has sometimes helped when it's just been the two of them watching the Saints on TV. I can see the eye-rolling from my scholarly brother when I say I've always considered Dad and Mom a great "team."

More than anything, I remember them being there. Whether it was our basketball or baseball games, or piano recitals or hospital stays, Dad and Mom were there. I know that couldn't always have been easy, but I feel like they made it a priority.

And speaking of priorities, let's go back to where we started. The summer of 1978 at Falls Creek Baptist Camp in southern Oklahoma. That year Dad wrote a book entitled *Costly Commitment*, and was asked to serve as the camp's main teacher for the same week that our youth group from First Baptist Church in Shawnee was set to attend. On the first big morning session, with thousands of kids on hand, Dad made an announcement. He held up a softball glove and explained to everyone that I'd left it at home by accident. He wanted to give it to me, right then, in front of everyone. I was in the choir loft behind him and rather slowly made my way to meet him and get the glove. His smile said two things to me, one that it was fun for him to have a little fun at my expense, but two, that he was proud to let everyone know who I was.

A few days later, during an evening service, I felt the call to go forward and publicly accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. It was an emotional experience for the dozens of us who made decisions that night. After talking with one of the camp counselors, I felt Dad's hand on my shoulder. We were able to share the most important moment of my life, something I'll always treasure.

Soon after, back at FBC in Shawnee, Dad baptized me. He also baptized my brother Dave a little more than a year later. Dad also performed the wedding ceremonies for Jeanna and me, and for Dave and his wife Carol. Years later Dad also spoke at the memorial service for our first daughter Allison, delivering a strong yet sweet message that helped lift our hearts during such a difficult time.

Not long before we moved from Shawnee to New Orleans, Dad came across an ad in a magazine for a "kit car" that those so inclined could put together at home. I guess Mom didn't put up too much of a fight because soon after we had the fiberglass body of a Bradley GT upside down in our garage. Our neighbors thought we had a boat, but Dad was meticulous about the

trim and detailing before turning the frame right side up. There were issues eventually getting the car registered after a memorable trip from Oklahoma to Louisiana, and at one point I bought Dad a little paperweight that said "Well done is better than well said." It was a joke, meant to needle him a bit since we had a cool looking car that we couldn't drive off the seminary campus, but I look back at that now and see his influence. His passion for sports spurred me to where I am. His love for church history no doubt inspired my brother to his college teaching career. Dad and Mom's support and guidance has been consistent and encompassing. The paperweight didn't have it quite right. When it comes to our Dad, it's well done AND well said.

Thanks, Dad. I love you.

# DR. DANIEL HOLCOMB



Charles S. Kelley, Jr., Th.D.

*Dr. Kelley is President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*

When you plant your life in a Southern Baptist seminary for more than 35 years, you have the privilege of getting to know some extraordinary people. Of the many such people I have known through my years at NOBTS, Dr. Daniel Holcomb will forever stand as one of the most excellent faculty members to have ever graced the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. If you had any of his classes as a student, worked alongside him as a colleague, or heard him preach and teach in churches and other venues, you understand why I would make such a statement. For those who have not experienced the touch of his life and ministry, allow me to briefly explain why his ministry here has been so significant.

Dr. Holcomb is a professor of church history, a subject he studied avidly throughout his adult life. To an expert's knowledge of the field, he added passion, creative insight, and applications relevant to every generation of students who took his classes. He made the subject come alive for the non-expert, a characteristic of all great teachers. A reputation as a professor who demanded the best from his students and would challenge them on every test and assignment did not keep students away from his classes. As far as they were concerned, it was a price worth paying in order to learn and experience what this man would teach you when you walked in the door of his classroom.

Being an outstanding church history scholar and excellent teacher is only part of what makes Dr. Holcomb so special in the annals of NOBTS. His deep personal interest in personal piety and the devotional classics led him to create an elective class exploring the inner life of the believer. In this "how to" age of pragmatism and a relentless focus on results, Dr. Holcomb began to explain why the formation of the soul was at the core of the Christian experience and an essential foundation for fruitful ministry. As he exposed students to writers of whom they had never heard, explored the meaning of a life devoted to God, and emphasized the difference intentionality makes in truly cultivating a walk with God, something special happened. The class became so popular he had to create doctoral versions of it to complement the MDiv course. This does not happen with elective courses, but it does happen when a gifted teacher is able to bring students with him into the disciplines that ignited his own passions. It is one thing to teach well a course that the curriculum demands students to take. It is another thing to offer such an excellent class that students demand that you teach it. As I said, Dr. Dan Holcomb is one of the most outstanding teachers to have ever graced the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Another aspect of Dr. Holcomb's ministry is his consistent excellence as a wordsmith. Words are the tools of all of us in the teaching ministry, but Dan uses his words with consistent excellence. We all looked forward to his times to preach in chapel. It was always a clinic on the difference between using a word and using the right word. He never sought to impress you with his vocabulary, but he never failed to impress you with the clarity of his words. Words were never wasted, never fuzzy, never casual. Each word was used in its proper sense and placed in its proper location. His tone was often prophetic, his subjects always relevant, and his presentation consistently rich with passion, humor, insight, and the kind of illustrations that stuck with you and kept his message engaged with your mind long after he finished. More than a wordsmith, Dr. Holcomb is an artist who uses words as his paint. Perhaps more so than any other person I have known, Dr. Holcomb is my living illustration of the power that accompanies the proper use of language.

This brief introduction cannot make Dr. Dan Holcomb fully known to one who does not know him, but it does need one more feature to come close to giving the reader a snapshot of his professional life. Dr. Holcomb has been a leader in this place. He held some important faculty leadership positions during his tenure at NOBTS, but his leadership skills were more important to our faculty than the positions he occupied. One may say the essence of leadership is choice and influence. A leader must choose the right issues, the right places, the right times to bring his skills to bear, and he must be able to influence those around him. Dan Holcomb has been such a man. When I became president our MDiv program was facing some significant challenges. After a year of intense analysis and discussion, it became clear to our leadership team we needed to rebuild the MDiv from scratch for the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a new and different philosophy undergirding the entire curriculum, and we needed to change completely our daily class schedule. Because we are a seminary of Baptists, such radical and profound change was not greeted with great excitement! We began a long process to work through all the issues slowly and carefully. A year passed, and we were making progress, but still not at the finish line.

Dan and I happened to be walking together to another meeting dealing with all the changes. As we walked he said words that meant a great deal to me: "This is the right thing to do, and it is going to be just fine." He began saying similar things to the faculty. Not too much later the most massive academic proposal anyone could remember came to the floor for faculty consideration. With very little discussion, it was adopted unanimously and implemented very smoothly. The effect on enrollment was immediate. Dr. Holcomb picked a strategic moment and exercised significant influence. That is but one example of a man who has been the kind of leader every faculty needs in order to achieve excellence. It is leadership as a function more than leadership as a position. It is Dan Holcomb.

We have been a stronger school because Dr. Dan Holcomb planted his life here and made a difference in the lives of his students and his colleagues. Thank you, Dr. Holcomb, for planting your life in this place and giving NOBTS your best year after year.

# A MAN WITH A GOOD NAME



**Jerry N. Barlow, Th.D.**

*Dr. Barlow is Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Work  
at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*

My first interaction with Dr. Dan Holcomb occurred when he was placed on my doctoral committee at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Because he had come to NOBTS in 1979 as a church history professor, I had not had the opportunity to take any of his master's courses and get to know him that way. Since my doctoral studies involved seminars in the major of preaching and a minor in theology and not history, Dr. Holcomb was a "mystery person" to me. However, as I completed my doctoral oral exam and dissertation defense and responded to his carefully crafted questions, I began to know him as a man to be greatly respected.

Where does respect begin? A very wise man named Solomon wrote, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1, NKJV). Through the years as I have gotten to know Dr. Dan Holcomb, I have come to recognize and respect him as a man with a good name.

Dan Holcomb, as I learned early on, came from a family with a good name. Like me, he was a "Petal boy" (as he called himself). In my hometown of Petal, Mississippi, the Holcomb name was highly regarded—i.e., the Holcombs were "good people" according to those who knew them. As Dan Holcomb grew up, he lived up to the good Holcomb name and that high regard. Solomon also stated that "a good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Dan's early life seemed to be a realization of such, as he became known as a young man with a good name, not just by heritage but by his own conduct and character.

Such also became evident when he came to teach at New Orleans Seminary. When I returned to NOBTS as an Associate Professor sixteen years ago, I came to see that few professors had the respect that Dan Holcomb had earned. Yes, I soon learned that this man with a good name also had been given another name, i.e., "Smoke'em Holcomb." Both students and faculty spoke somewhat reverently when they referred to Dr. Holcomb with that name. However, the nickname only underscored what I too came to see—i.e., Dan Holcomb was fair but demanding of his students, just as he was of himself as a teacher and scholar.

A television commercial from several years ago made the point that "when E. F. Hutton speaks, everyone listens." As a new professor at NOBTS, I soon learned that when Dr. Dan Holcomb rose to speak in faculty meetings, everyone listened. Just as he had done in my oral exam and dissertation defense, Dr. Holcomb spoke carefully and thoughtfully. Few faculty members could speak for the faculty or could represent the faculty with the regard in which he was held by his

colleagues, as well as by the seminary President and Trustees. We also appreciated his insightful humor and engaging smile when he “made his point” in whatever he said in faculty meetings or in his chapel sermons.

Through the years of his long tenure at New Orleans Seminary, Dr. Dan Holcomb has consistently remained a good man with a good name, greatly valued and esteemed as a colleague, teacher, researcher, writer, and scholar. To me and to others who love him and his wife, Olga, he is an example that “by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life” (Proverbs 22:4). Such is the legacy of a man with a good name.



# MY REFLECTIONS ON DAN HOLCOMB



**Michael H. Edens, Ph.D.**

*Dr. Edens is Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies  
at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*

I first met Dr. Dan Holcomb when I was taking Ph.D. seminars while on furlough from International Mission Board service. He was in his fourth decade of teaching and first decade at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He invited me to a master's class to discuss the rise of Islam. I was impressed by his keen wit and disciplined mind, and an abiding intent to prepare his students broadly and excellently for leadership and ministry. I have come to characterize him as the oldest young man I've ever met. No, I'm not talking about his zeal to adopt new electronic communication tools. He does disdain e-mail. Instead, I'm referring to his vigor and joy of life. I believe his passions are the source of his vigor.

Dan's passions begin in his deep relationship with and faith in his Lord Jesus Christ. That union in Christ creates a passion for the local body of believers. On several occasions I have served congregations where Dan has preached. His love of God, the Bible, ministry, and that congregation causes his sermons to be high points in the lives of members of the congregation. Whether the gathering is small and rural or large and urban, Dr. Holcomb prepares and hones his message carefully because he is addressing the Lord's bride—the Church. Even years later the evidence of his passion is apparent as people relate the impact of his sermons and ministry.

In public and private moments another passion animates Dan—the care of his family. From his loving attention for Olga to the pride in a son's work in broadcast, his family moves this godly man. His emotions, time, and skill are theirs. When asked about a painful injury (the result of a touch football game with grandchildren), Dan made it clear those kids were worth anything and everything he had to give.

However, Dan's teaching is where I personally have witnessed his love and commitment to Christ as a dominating influence. Whether team teaching together or just discussing some of the problems our students face, I am always learning the art of teaching when I am with Dan. He worships his God with offerings of teaching and mentoring.

Once as we discussed the challenges of Christian leadership, he laid out an analogy which is still teaching me today, months later. He said that southern society, including Christian institutions, is marked by plantation leadership patterns. We have owners, household slaves, and field slaves. In the church we know that we are to lead as servants, so a biblical model is usually combined with the plantation pattern making a leadership matrix. The two most accessible

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patterns are Moses and Jesus. The contrast between their two mountain experiences, Moses on Sinai and Jesus in transfiguration, is striking. Moses came down to judge, Jesus to heal and encourage towards prayer and maturity. Dan's point is that we need to struggle against ourselves and the aggrandizing influence of power. Or as Jesus said, "If any would be my disciple let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me."

Dan is a teacher who leads not because of his position but because of the impact of the Master Teacher, Jesus, on and in his life. Dan heard His call and has given himself fully to obey.

# THANK YOU TO THE MAN WHO CHANGED HISTORY



Peter Kendrick, Ph.D.

*Dr. Kendrick is Regional Associate Dean for Georgia and Alabama,  
and Professor of Theology and Culture at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*

Ever since my graduation from school, at every Southern Baptist Convention that I attend, I always come around the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary booth hoping to find just one person: Dr. Dan “Smoke ’em” Holcomb. When I find him I say one simple sentence: “Thank you for making such a difference in my life!”

How can one professor make such a singular difference? I could say that he was the role-model of an effective, dynamic, and compassionate professor; he was definitely that. I could say that he was one of the most accessible teachers I’ve ever had; that would be true. It was his daily custom to stop by the cafeteria to talk with us. I could say that his lectures were detailed, challenging, and enthralling; they were definitely that. I wish I could say that his tests were easy; they were not. In fact, they are still some of the hardest tests I’ve taken and lived to tell about.

How can one professor make such a singular difference? In one of those teachable moments, sitting in the school cafeteria, Dr. Holcomb made one of the most profound and life-changing statements to me that has served as my compass in teaching.

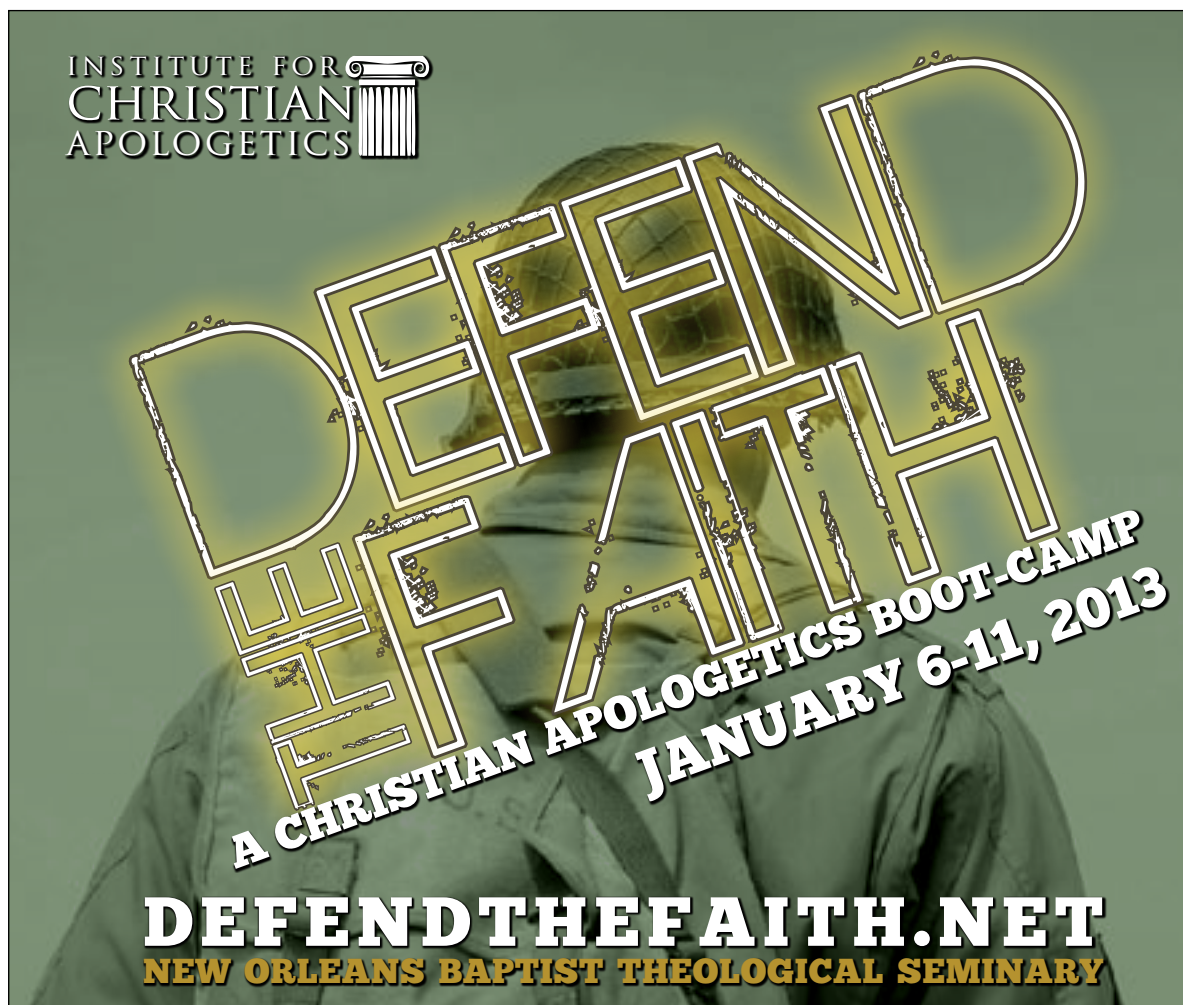
There were about four of us that day. Dr. Holcomb took a seat and asked all of us a simple question: “Why is the study of history important?” We smartly answered, “Because it’s required for graduation.” He shook his head. We braced for what we knew would be Dr. Holcomb’s pontification on the intellectual and cultural benefits of Christian history, but instead he replied, “Because it is His story and your story.”

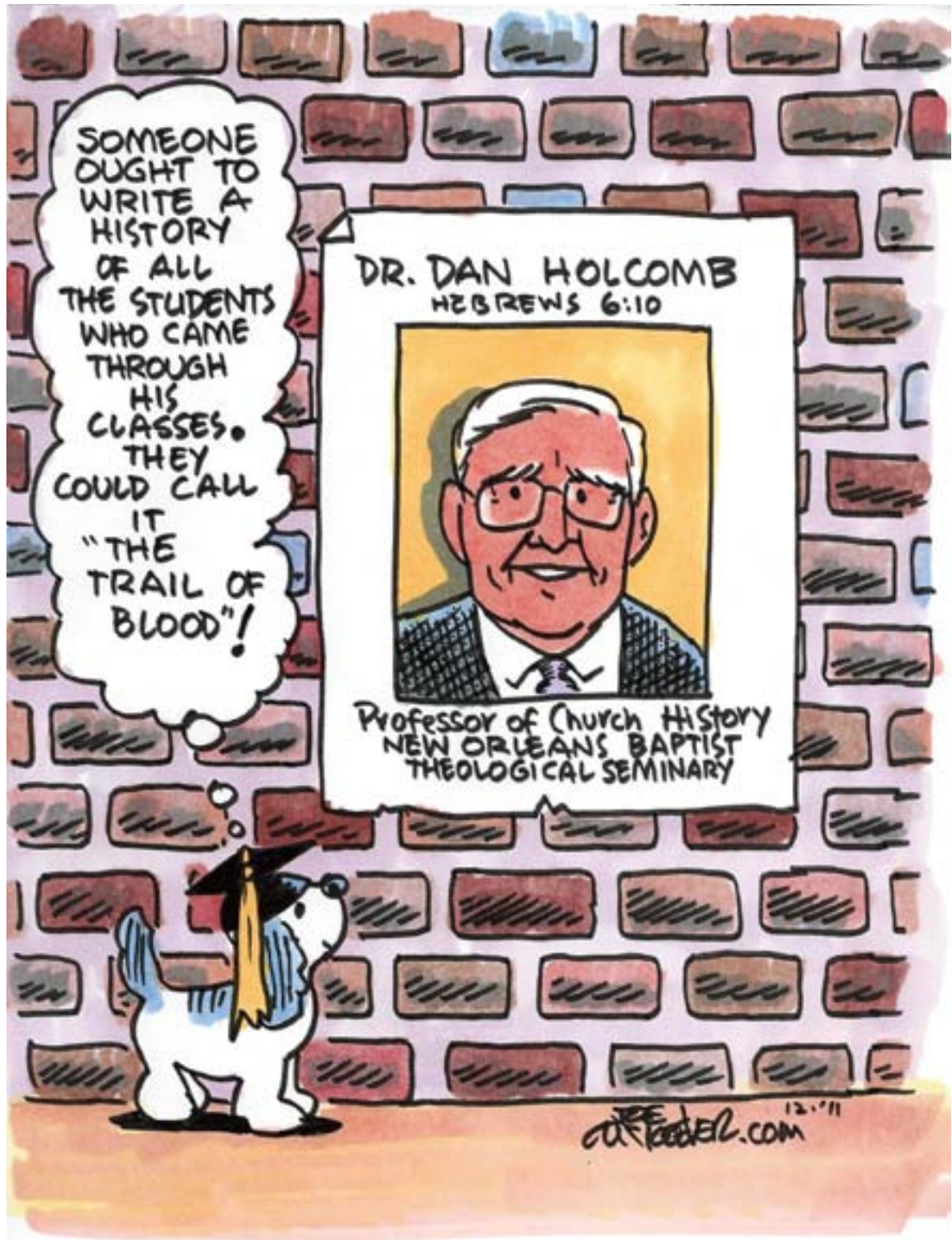
History, for Dr. Holcomb, was never about dead people, dates, and mind numbing pointless factoids about why something happened. History, he said, was nothing less than the story of God’s compassion and redemptive work. It was His-story and His-story was worth studying.

Just as importantly, history, for Dr. Holcomb, was a drama in which I had a role; it was my story. That day, Dr. Holcomb asked us, “How many people does it take to change history?” The answer was one: one Christ, one Esther, one Martin Luther, one Oskar Schindler, one Anne Frank, and one Martin Luther King, Jr.; it only takes one person to change the history of, if not the world, one life.

It felt as if he was looking straight at me when he said, “Who knows? You can be that one person!” In that one teachable moment Dr. Dan “Smoke ’em” Holcomb changed my history.

“Thank you” just doesn’t sound like enough.





# DANIEL H. HOLCOMB

————— *Clay Corvin December 25, 2011* —————

Pastor, servant  
Teacher, leader  
Husband, father  
A man of God

He loves his wife  
She is by his side  
Loves his children  
Cares for people

Jesus is his guide  
His faith proven by a lifetime of actions  
He loves Jesus  
NOBTS is blessed by his service

Dan is a focused academician  
Always courteous and gentle  
His Humility is pervasive  
He lives what he teaches

Classic courses  
Students seek him out  
He cares that they learn and survive  
Glorifying Jesus in his life and work

# PART II

# HISTORY



*‘We have heard with our ears, O God,  
Our fathers have told us,  
The deeds You did in their days’*

Psalms 44:1

# TERTULLIANISM: TERTULLIAN'S VISION OF THE NEW PROPHECY IN NORTH AFRICA



Rex D. Butler, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics  
at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary,  
a colleague in the Church History department with Dr. Holcomb*

## Introduction

Historians have long suspected that, after Tertullian embraced Montanism, or the New Prophecy, during the first decade of the third century, he reshaped the movement in North Africa according to his own extreme rigorism. It has been suggested that, although the founders of Montanism in Asia had made ascetic demands on their followers more severe than their Catholic counterparts, Tertullian took those expectations even further in such areas as post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom.

The difficulty in comparing Montanism in Asia and North Africa lies in the scarcity of primary sources due to Catholic zeal in eliminating what the larger church considered a heretical movement. As a result, most of the oracles and *logia* from Montanist prophets are preserved only in the polemical writings of anti-Montanists or in Tertullian's treatises. Tertullian's interpretations of these oracles and *logia*, however, may not reflect the tenets of the founders of the movement. Indeed, the oracles and *logia* quoted by Tertullian may have originated from second- or third-generation Montanists in Carthage and, therefore, may have been influenced directly by Tertullian.

A helpful tool in distinguishing North African Montanism, or "Tertullianism," from Asian Montanism is the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. This document records the martyrdom of several catechumens and their teacher in Carthage in 203 and reflects the teachings and practices of Montanism, which arrived in North Africa just a few years earlier. If the *Passion* is indeed a Montanist document, it can serve as a bridge between Asian Montanism and Tertullian's vision for the New Prophecy in North Africa.

This research project compares what is known of Montanism in Asia with Tertullian's Montanist teachings in the areas of post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom. By examining also what the *Passion* reflects in these areas, proposals are offered regarding the influence that Tertullian exerted on Montanism in North Africa.



## Montanism and Tertullianism

Montanism, or the New Prophecy as its early proponents and opponents called it, developed in the third quarter of the second century under the leadership of Montanus, a charismatic prophet, and his two female followers, Priscilla and Maximilla. The movement originated in Phrygia, the region immediately to the east of the cities where John's letters to the seven churches of Revelation circulated. Emphases found in Johannine literature were prominent in Montanism: the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ's imminent return. Other Montanist tenets and practices included glossolalia, ecstatic prophecy, women's leadership in ministry, and rigorous discipline.

Historians have characterized Montanism variously as a renewal of primitive Christianity, a synthesis of Christianity and Phrygian cultic religion, and a heretical movement. Identification of Montanism with Phrygian religion, however, contradicts its rapid and far-reaching spread to Rome and North Africa. Furthermore, if Montanism were an outright heresy, it would not have attracted the adherence of Tertullian, the outstanding Christian apologist and polemicist of his day. Therefore, Montanism must be considered a reform movement, which placed authority in the hands of charismatic prophets in opposition to the developing Catholic episcopacy.

Due to the opposition of the Catholic Church to Montanism, none of the writings by the founders or their followers in Asia survived the Constantinian era, when the ecclesiastical hierarchy united with the imperial forces to purge all dissenters and their documents. As a result, the only extant records of their teachings are found in quotations by anti-Montanist polemicists used as resources by fourth-century historians and heresiologists such as Eusebius and Epiphanius. This information is tainted by hostility, speculation, or late interpolation and, therefore, obscures much of the doctrine and practice of the Asian new prophets.

For this reason, many historians have depended upon Tertullian's writings for their understanding of Montanism. Tertullian embraced the tenets of Montanism at some point during the first decade of the third century, and, because of his reputation, most of his writings, even those of his Montanist period, survived the Catholic purge, one exception being his defense of Montanism in seven books referred to as *De ecstasi*.

In his later, extant writings, Tertullian promoted several rigorous practices of the *nova prophetia*, claiming that many of them were the teachings of the Paraclete. For centuries, historians assumed that these tenets were part of the original, Asian Montanism, but more recent scholars have questioned this assumption, recognizing that Tertullian had sufficient personality to assert his own ascetic temperament on this movement.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. J. Lawlor, "The Heresy of the Phrygians," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1908): 481-99; Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67, 117.

Tertullian's personality was such that, eventually, those who followed his teachings became known as Tertullianists, who were first mentioned by Augustine in his treatise *De haeresibus*.<sup>2</sup> The nature of these sectarians has been the subject of much conjecture. Augustine assumed that Tertullian withdrew from the Montanists to found his own congregations, creating yet another schism. W. H. C. Frend interpreted Augustine's report to mean that Tertullian became even more severe than the Montanists,<sup>3</sup> but John de Soyres speculated that Tertullian separated from the Montanists to rejoin the Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Timothy David Barnes, however, concluded that Tertullianists were not members of a separate sect but simply the "Montanist party in Africa,"<sup>5</sup> a position made tenable by the consideration that other Montanist factions, such as Priscillianists and Quintillianists, adopted the names of their leaders. William Tabbernee agreed with Barnes but added that the Tertullianists were not contemporary with Tertullian but were a post-Cyprianic sect or even post-Constantinian sect.<sup>6</sup>

Most likely, the Tertullianists were indeed the practitioners of Montanism in North Africa, as Barnes asserted. Nonetheless, North African Montanism was not necessarily identical with Asian Montanism. Evidence indicates that, Tertullian's influence shaped the movement according to his even more rigorous and ascetic personality. Therefore, as the movement developed in North Africa, it may be termed, albeit anachronistically, Tertullianism.

## North African Montanism

The advent of Montanism to North Africa is a mystery as is the origin of African Christianity. Both these events seemed to be linked in Frend's estimation: "The origin of the African Church is one of the great 'missing links' in Church History. If we knew more about the beginnings of the Church there, we should be in a better position to say why Montanism was so successful

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<sup>2</sup>Augustine, *De haeresibus* 86.

<sup>3</sup>W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 366.

<sup>4</sup>John de Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprint, Lexington, KY: The American Theological Library Association, 1965), 53.

<sup>5</sup>Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971; rev. ed. 1985), 258. See also J. M. Fuller, "Tertullian," *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. 4, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1887).

<sup>6</sup>William Tabbernee, "To Pardon or Not to Pardon?: North-African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins," *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 377.

in the West, and why the hard, rigorist, martyr-inspired code which it represented should find a permanent place in the Christianity of North Africa and hence in the Western Church as a whole.”<sup>7</sup> In this atmosphere, Montanism arrived and thrived near the turn of the third century.<sup>8</sup>

The advent of Montanism was accompanied by written documents that, among the new prophets, were considered as authoritative as the scriptures that were canonized later.<sup>9</sup> Presumably, Tertullian possessed written copies of oracles and *logia* delivered by the three original and, possibly, second-generation new prophets, which are evident in quotations included in treatises from his Montanist era.<sup>10</sup>

These treatises, however, contain a number of oracles that originated from sources other than Asian new prophets. Tertullian cited prophetesses in his own congregation in support of his teachings on the corporeality of the spirit and the length of virgins’ veils, and his role in these prophecies included testing and recording them.<sup>11</sup> Aside from these two references to Carthaginian prophetesses, Tertullian quoted several *logia* from unidentified sources,<sup>12</sup> attributing them to the

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<sup>7</sup>Freund, 361. See also Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913), 469; Anne Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 150.

<sup>8</sup>Assuming that the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is a Montanist document, Montanism must have arrived in Carthage before 203. Assuming also that Tertullian became a Christian in the mid-190s and embraced Montanism at a later date, the influence of the movement must not have been felt in Carthage until the turn of the century, or else Tertullian would have been attracted to it immediately. Trevett, 70-1.

<sup>9</sup>Hippolytus, *haer.* 8.7.

<sup>10</sup>Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.24.4; *jej.* 1.3. See also William Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles: A New Classification,” unpublished paper delivered to The Second Century Seminary, Waco, Texas, February 19, 2004, 4-14; Dennis E. Groh, “Utterance and Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Montanist Crisis,” in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Sanders*, ed. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1985), 82-4.

<sup>11</sup>Tertullian, *anim.* 9.4; *virg.* 17.3.

<sup>12</sup>Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 25-7.

Paraclete,<sup>13</sup> the Spirit,<sup>14</sup> or the Lord.<sup>15</sup> Tabbernee has suggested that possibly some of these also were delivered by third-generation, Carthaginian prophets<sup>16</sup> and prophetesses.<sup>17</sup>

As an advocate of the New Prophecy, Tertullian promoted the authority of the Spirit's continuing revelatory activity<sup>18</sup> and did not hesitate to record, test, and accept the oracles of the prophet(esse)s in his congregation and then to cite them as support for his teachings.<sup>19</sup> The possibility remains, however, that Tertullian may have exercised either direct or subconscious influence on these prophet(esse)s and thus shaping North African Montanism in ways suited to his rigorous asceticism.

## Differences between Asian Montanism and Tertullianism

One way to measure Tertullian's impact on Montanism after it came to North Africa is to compare his treatises as well as these oracles and *logia* from unidentified, presumably Carthaginian sources to what is known of Asian Montanism. Three key issues for comparison are post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom.

### Post-baptismal Forgiveness

Tertullian's change of position on the issue of post-baptismal forgiveness is well known. In his treatise *De paenitentia*, written around the turn of the third century, Tertullian allowed a second but final opportunity for repentance and forgiveness of sin committed after baptism. The penitent must undergo a process known as *exomologesis*, which included prostration before the elders of the church in sackcloth and ashes, fasting, praying, and confessing before the congregation. Though strict, this penitence afforded absolution for both spiritual and carnal sins.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Tertullian, *pud.* 21.7; *virg.* 1.7; *fug.* 11.2; *anim.* 55.5, 58.8; *Prax.* 8.5.

<sup>14</sup>Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4, 11.2; *jej.* 13.5.

<sup>15</sup>Tertullian, *virg.* 1.7.

<sup>16</sup>Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.22.5.

<sup>17</sup>Tabbernee, "To Pardon or Not to Pardon?," 380-2.

<sup>18</sup>Tertullian, *virg.* 1.4-7; *res. mort.* 63.7-9; *Prax.* 30.5; *mon.* 3.1; *fug.* 9.4, 11.2, 14.3; *anim.* 55.5, 58.8; *cor.* 1.4.

<sup>19</sup>Tabbernee, "The Montanist Oracles," 14-15.

<sup>20</sup>Tertullian, *paen.* 7.10; 9.1-6; 3.8.

About a decade later, Tertullian wrote *De pudicitia*, a treatise that expounded a decidedly more severe restriction on post-baptismal forgiveness. In its introduction, he repudiated his earlier views and insisted instead that indulgence must not be granted to believers who commit the most extreme sins, such as adultery and fornication.<sup>21</sup> In his offensive against such practices, he condemned the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which he named “Shepherd of adulterers” (*Pastore moechorum*),<sup>22</sup> because it permitted one opportunity for repentance after baptism.<sup>23</sup> Later, he included apostasy, murder, and idolatry in the list of sins that were unpardonable by the church.<sup>24</sup> Among his concluding arguments is this citation: “I have the Paraclete himself speaking in the new prophets: ‘The church has the power to forgive sin, but I will not do it, lest others also sin.’”<sup>25</sup>

Traditionally, scholars have assumed that Montanus was the source of this oracle. Tertullian, however, attributed it only to “the Paraclete himself speaking in the new prophets.” Based on the observation that Tertullian did not hesitate to accept and to cite oracles delivered by prophetesses in his congregation, the assertion can be made that this oracle originated not with Montanus but with a contemporary, Carthaginian new prophet(ess).<sup>26</sup>

The next issue to consider is Tertullian’s involvement with this prophecy. Anne Jensen suggested that Tertullian either uttered such an oracle himself or requested it.<sup>27</sup> Such assertions are unlikely, but the possibility remains that Tertullian discussed the restriction of post-baptismal forgiveness in his congregation and stimulated the new prophet(esse)s present to receive such a revelation from the Paraclete.<sup>28</sup> If such a scenario occurred in Carthage, then it is a distinct possibility that the restrictions that Tertullian placed on post-baptismal forgiveness went beyond the rigorism of Asian Montanism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Tertullian, *pud.* 1.6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 20.2. All English translations of ancient sources are mine.

<sup>23</sup>*Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 4.3.1-7; cf. .4.1.1-10. See also Cahal B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1993), 128-9.

<sup>24</sup>Tertullian, *pud.* 22.11.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 21.7.

<sup>26</sup>Tabbernee, “To Pardon or Not to Pardon?,” 382.

<sup>27</sup>Jensen, 160.

<sup>28</sup>Tabbernee, “To Pardon or not to Pardon?,” 382-3.

<sup>29</sup>Jensen, 150.

### Martyrs' Power of the Keys

To determine the novelty of Tertullian's doctrine concerning post-baptismal repentance in comparison to the practice of Asian Montanism, it is necessary first to examine the attitude of the early Montanists toward the martyrs' power of the keys. Direct evidence is scarce other than two complaints registered by the anti-Montanist Apollonius against Montanist leaders. First, he reported that Themiso bribed his way out of prison yet claimed the title of martyr and, following the example of "the apostle,"<sup>30</sup> wrote a general epistle. Second, Apollonius contended that Alexander had been imprisoned not for the Christian faith but for robbery and still considered himself a martyr. After they were released, both Themiso and Alexander proceeded to exercise what they considered to be their prerogatives as confessors/martyrs to forgive sins. Apollonius questioned their rights with sarcasm: "Who pardons whose sins? Does the prophet pardon the martyr's larcenies, or the martyr, the prophet's avarice?"<sup>31</sup> Although expressed negatively, Apollonius' charge implied that Montanists awarded to their confessors/martyrs the authority to bind and to loose.<sup>32</sup>

Indirect evidence regarding the Montanists' attitude toward the martyrs' power of the keys is found in the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, penned by the survivors of an anti-Christian pogrom in Gaul and addressed to their home churches in Asia and Phrygia.<sup>33</sup> The letter includes references to a variety of Montanistic tenets: emphasis on the Spirit/Paraclete, zeal for martyrdom, leadership by women, prophetic revelation, fasting, and elevation of martyrs/confessors. These references, coupled with the geographic origin of the Gallic Christians, suggest that they had been influenced by an early, proto-Montanistic expression of the Christian faith.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Perhaps Apollonius referred to Apostle John, whose writings were especially dear to the New Prophets.

<sup>31</sup> Apollonius, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.18.5-10. See also Frederick C. Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism," *Church History* 49 (September 1985): 255.

<sup>32</sup>H. J. Lawlor, 490.

<sup>33</sup>*The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.1.3.

<sup>34</sup>Heinrich Kraft, "Die Lyoner Märtyrer und der Montanismus," in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, ed. Ernst Dassmann and K. Suso Frank, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 8, ed. Franz Joseph Dölger (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), 266.

At the conclusion of the letter, the writer said of the confessors: "They defended all but accused no one. They loosed all but bound no one."<sup>35</sup> These confessors used their authority to forgive rather than to condemn.

Eusebius added this statement to this section of the letter: "Let this then be usefully said about the love of these blessed martyrs for their brothers who had fallen, especially in view of the cruel and pitiless attitude of those who later were so unsparing towards the members of Christ's body."<sup>36</sup> Pierre de Labriolle suggested that one possible target of Eusebius' reference to "the cruel and pitiless attitude" was the Montanists, although he pointed also to the Novatianists.<sup>37</sup> G. A. Williamson thought it more likely that Eusebius intended Novatianists or Donatists by this remark.<sup>38</sup> The Donatists were contemporary to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and would have been much on his mind, considering the trouble that they had caused Eusebius' hero, Constantine. All three of these movements, however, were known for their rigidity toward apostates, and he could have meant to include all three in his scathing indictment.

His understanding of the Montanists' severity toward apostates, however, might have been derived from the North African movement influenced by Tertullian rather than the Asian New Prophecy.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the attitude of the original New Prophets may be reflected more by the Gallic Christians whom Eusebius extolled. The many characteristics which these two groups shared have already been pointed out. One more may have been the willingness of martyrs/confessors to use their power of the keys to forgive.

Certainly, Tertullian, in his Montanist writings, denied such authority to martyrs. In his treatise *De pudicitia*, he criticized those who granted the power of the keys to imprisoned confessors and complained that, as soon as the chains were fastened, the prisoners were sought out by adulterers, fornicators, apostates, and even murderers and idolaters for forgiveness of their transgressions. The martyr, according to Tertullian, could purge his or her own sins through death but not the sins of others.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>*The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.2.5.

<sup>36</sup>Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.2.8.

<sup>37</sup>de Labriolle, 230.

<sup>38</sup>G. A. Williamson, ed., *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* by Eusebius, trans. with introduction by G. A. Williamson (New York: Dorset, 1965), 205 n. 3.

<sup>39</sup>Another fourth-century patriarch, Jerome, Letter 41.3, had a similarly negative view of Montanists, that they close the church doors to errant sinners rather than to lead them back to repentance. Their strictness, according to Jerome, did not prevent sinning, only pardon. But Jerome, like Eusebius, observed a post-Tertullian Montanism, which may have varied from the original movement.

<sup>40</sup>Tertullian, *pud.* 22.1-11.

Tertullian's position against the martyrs' power of the keys stands in marked contrast to that of the Asian Montanists as exemplified by Themiso and Alexander and reflected by the Gallic confessors. His clear departure from Montanist doctrine on martyrs' authority to forgive sins probably mirrored a similar departure on the subject of post-baptismal penance. Therefore, it seems likely that, just as Asian Montanists allowed the martyrs' power of the keys, they also allowed post-baptismal forgiveness in contrast to Tertullian's restriction, which was based, in part, on an oracle delivered most likely by a Carthaginian prophet(ess) in his own congregation.

### Voluntary Martyrdom

Tertullian's refusal to grant the power of the keys to martyrs/confessors derived from his denial of post-baptismal forgiveness rather than any minimization of martyrdom as a Christian discipline. On the contrary, Tertullian insisted upon voluntary martyrdom as the duty of Christians in opposition to the accepted views of the orthodox church.

In orthodox acts of martyrs, voluntary martyrdom was not approved. In the mid-second century, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* included a pericope about Quintus, a Phrygian who had given himself up voluntarily and encouraged others to do likewise. Because he recanted, the writer stated, "This is the reason, brothers, that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves: this is not the teaching of the Gospel."<sup>41</sup> A century later, Cyprian reiterated the Catholic policy: ". . . our discipline forbids anyone to surrender voluntarily."<sup>42</sup>

Many scholars have assumed that the Montanists, in opposition to the Catholics, encouraged voluntary martyrdom. According to Eusebius' anonymous source, the Montanists valued the martyrs among their ranks and pointed to them as proof of their prophetic spirit,<sup>43</sup> but this report did not specify that their martyrs voluntarily surrendered themselves. For the most part, scholars' assumptions about the Montanist attitude toward voluntary martyrdom have been based upon oracles recorded by Tertullian.

Two oracles were included in the treatise *De fuga in persecutione*. In the first, the Spirit says, "Are you publicly exposed? . . . It is good for you. For anyone who is not shamed before humans is shamed before the Lord. Do not be dismayed: your righteousness reveals you to the public. Why are you ashamed since you are receiving glory? There is power when you are being observed by people." In the second, the Spirit is also cited: "Do not hope to die in your own beds or in miscarriages and anemic fevers, but in martyrs' deaths, in order that he who has suffered for you

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<sup>41</sup>*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4.

<sup>42</sup>*The Acts of St. Cyprian* 1.

<sup>43</sup>Anonymous, cited by Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.16.20.



may be glorified.”<sup>44</sup> Tertullian possibly paraphrased part of this second oracle in his treatise *De anima*: “If you would die for God’s sake, as the Paraclete advises, let it not be in anemic fevers or in your own beds, but in martyrdom.” Tertullian coupled this counsel to seek martyrdom with his belief that the “only key to Paradise is your life-blood.”<sup>45</sup>

The origin of these oracles, like the one on post-baptismal forgiveness, has been called into question by Tabbernee and attributed by him to Carthaginian prophetesses.<sup>46</sup> Earlier, Tabbernee suggested that, even if the oracles had been uttered by Montanus, they were misinterpreted by Tertullian to support his argument in favor of voluntary martyrdom: “Truly, if you ask counsel of the Spirit, what does he recommend more than the word of the Spirit? In fact, nearly all are exhorted to martyrdom not to flight.”<sup>47</sup> No matter the source of these oracles, Tertullian’s view on voluntary martyrdom, according to Tabbernee, cannot be assumed to reflect the view of the original Montanists.

Again, the view of the Asian Montanists is obscure. Out of the historical record, however, can be drawn two possible accounts of Montanists who volunteered for martyrdom, one in the acts of the martyrs and another in a story preserved by Tertullian.<sup>48</sup>

In the earlier reference to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Quintus was introduced as a Phrygian who, during the persecution of Christians in Smyrna, gave himself up and encouraged others to do the same yet, when he saw the wild animals, became a coward.<sup>49</sup> Quintus’ identification as a Phrygian, along with his voluntary surrender, has led many scholars to label him as a Montanist.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4.

<sup>45</sup>Tertullian, *an.* 55.5. See also Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 16.

<sup>46</sup>Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 16.

<sup>47</sup>Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4. See also William Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 17 (1985): 36-8.

<sup>48</sup>Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” 38-41, listed five disputed accounts and discounted all of them. Only two are included here because they should be considered as potentially valid accounts.

<sup>49</sup>*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4.

<sup>50</sup>Charles Bigg, *The Origins of Christianity*, ed. T. B. Strong (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1909), 186; W. M. Calder, “Philadelphia and Montanism,” *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 7 (1923): 332-6; H. Grégoire and P. Orgels, “La véritable date du martyre de S. Polycarpe (23 février 177) et le *Corpus Polycarpianum*,” *Analecta Bollandistes* 69 (1951): 21-2; M. Simonetti, “Alcune osservazioni sul martirio di S. Policarpo,” *Giornale italiano di filologia* 9 (1956): 338-40; Hans von Campenhausen, “Bearbeitungen

This supposition, however, is complicated by two factors. First, the dating of Polycarp's death<sup>51</sup> and the origins of Montanism,<sup>52</sup> although both are debated, are almost contemporaneous, making Quintus' connections to the sect less likely. Nonetheless, Hans von Campenhausen discovered in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* three strata of redaction: the original letter; an anti-Montanistic addition; and a revision by an *Evangelion-Redaktor*, who drew attention to parallels between Polycarp's martyrdom and Jesus' passion. Therefore, according to von Campenhausen, the episode of Quintus was added later, in the late second or early third century, by an opponent of Montanists to counter their promotion of voluntary martyrdom.<sup>53</sup>

Second, Quintus' description as a Phrygian did not identify him necessarily as a Montanist. Sources equating the two terms appeared late in the second century,<sup>54</sup> and the further clarification that he "had only recently come from Phrygia" suggested a geographic rather than a religious designation.<sup>55</sup>

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und Interpolationen des Polykarmartyriums," in *Aus der Frühzeit des Christentums: Studien zur Kirchengeschichte des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1963), 270-1; Frend, 217; Gerd Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp übersetzt und erklärt*, Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern, vol. 6, ed. N. Brox, G. Kretschmar, and K. Niederwimmer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998), 128-9; idem., "Martyrium Polycarpi 4 und der Montanismus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1995): 110-2; William C. Weinrich, *Spirit and Martyrdom: A Study of the Works of the Holy Spirit in Contexts of Persecution and Martyrdoms in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 179 n. 17.

<sup>51</sup>Internal evidence suggested that Polycarp died about 155/6 (Timothy David Barnes, "Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 512; Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. with an introduction by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), xiii; B. Dehandschutter, "The Martyrdom of Polycarp and the Outbreak of Montanism," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 75 (1999): 430). Eusebius' dating in the *Chronicon* indicated a date of 167 (von Campenhausen, 254).

<sup>52</sup>Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.27; 5.3.4, dated the beginning of Montanus' prophecy in the middle of Marcus Aurelius' reign (161-80), about 171, and the spread of the movement in 177. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 48.1.2, however, dated the origins of Montanism nineteen years after Anoninus Pius (138-61) became emperor, that is, 157. See also Timothy David Barnes, "The Chronology of Montanism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970): 403-4.

<sup>53</sup>von Campenhausen, 291-2.

<sup>54</sup>According to Tabbernee, "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom," 44 n. 12, the earliest example is by Anonymous, quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.16.22. For the date of the Anonymous, see Trevett, 14.

<sup>55</sup>Tabbernee, "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom," 41.

The proposal of von Campenhausen, however, is quite suggestive. If the Quintus-pericope were interpolated in the late second century, about the same time that Montanists began to be identified as Phrygians, then it could be assumed that Quintus represented, in the mind of the redactor, the inclination of Asian Montanists toward voluntary martyrdom. Therefore, even though the redactor disagreed with the Montanists, he or she viewed them as supporting voluntary martyrdom in contradiction to the Catholic policy.

The second, possible reference to Asian Montanists' volunteering for martyrdom is found in Tertullian's letter *Ad Scapulam*, one of his last, extant writings composed about 212.<sup>56</sup> During a persecution instigated in 185 by Arrius Antoninus, proconsul of Asia, the entire body of Christians in that province presented themselves before the judgment seat for execution. The proconsul executed a few of them but told the rest, "You wretched people, if you wish to die, you have precipices or nooses."<sup>57</sup>

W. H. C. Frend attributed the zeal of these Christians to the spirit of Montanism and pointed out that the letter in which the story was preserved was addressed to the proconsul of Africa, where Montanism was widespread.<sup>58</sup> Tabbernee, on the other hand, contended that neither the expression of voluntary martyrdom nor the authorship of Tertullian proved necessarily that these Asian Christians were Montanists. Upon careful consideration, however, the fact that Tertullian, well into his affiliation with Montanism, publicized this story in a protest against persecution written to a proconsul in North Africa weighs heavily in favor of the possibility that these Christians indeed were Montanists.

Nonetheless, although the actions of Quintus or these Asian Christians might be helpful in determining Montanist practice regarding voluntary martyrdom, neither can be identified with certainty as Montanists. Furthermore, evidence outside of Tertullian's writings about Montanist attitudes toward this issue is scarce. The same can be said concerning early Montanist teachings on the previously discussed subjects of post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys. Therefore, it is necessary to seek elsewhere, if possible, for information about what Montanists taught when their sect arrived in North Africa.

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<sup>56</sup>Barnes, *Tertullian*, 55.

<sup>57</sup>Tertullian, *Scap.* 5.1.

<sup>58</sup>Frend, 293.

## *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*

Written shortly after the turn of the third century, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*<sup>59</sup> reported the martyrdom of several catechumens and their teacher in Carthage in 203. The *Passion* includes not only an eyewitness account of these Christians' deaths but also the personal diaries of two of them: Perpetua, a young noblewoman; and Saturus, the teacher. This document is one of the most precious to come out of the patristic period, but one of its most intriguing features is its many expressions of Montanistic thought, practice, and enthusiasm.

The question of whether the martyrs and the editor of the *Passion* were adherents of Montanism has spurred considerable debate among scholars for centuries. Varying positions among historians include denial of any influence of Montanism,<sup>60</sup> acceptance of Montanism only in the editor,<sup>61</sup> and affirmation of Montanism as the essential basis for the work.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>The most recent critical edition of the Latin and Greek texts is Jacqueline Amat, ed., *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivi de Actes*, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 417 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cert, 1996). There are many English translations, but the standard is Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. with an introduction by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 106-31.

<sup>60</sup>Theodorici Ruinart, *Admonitio in Passionem SS. Perpetuae, Felicitatis, etc.*, in *Acta Martyrum* (Regensburg: G. Josephi Manz, 1859), 135-6; Giuseppe Agostino Orsi, *Dissertatio Apologetica pro Sanctarum Perpetuae, Felicitatis et sociorum martyrum Orthodoxia adversus Samuelem Basnagium* (Florentiae: Typis Bernardi Paperini, 1728), cited by de Soyres, 44; Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Second Christian Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 427-8; Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, eds., *History of the Church*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*, by Karl Baus, with an introduction by Hubert Jedin (New York: Seabury, 1980), 218-9; Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 158; Weinrich, 225-9; and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and Cyprian* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1992), 15.

<sup>61</sup>C. E. Freppel, *Tertullien*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ambroise Bray, 1864), 347-9; Henri LeClercq, *Les Martyrs*, vol. 1, *Les Temps Neroniens et le Deuxième Siècle* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1902), 120-1; Adhémar d'Ales, *La Théologie de Tertullien*, 3d ed. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne and Company, 1905), 6-18; Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1913), 341-53; Paul Allard, *Histoire des persecutions*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1919), 104-8; Louis J. Rogier, ed., *The Christian Centuries*, vol. 1, *The First Six Hundred Years*, by Jean Daniélou and Henri Marrou, trans. Vincent Cronin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 144, 154; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1966), 49-5; and Maureen Tilley, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary* ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 832-6.

<sup>62</sup>Samuel Basnage, *Annales politico-ecclesiastici* (1706), 203, cited by Nathaniel Lardner, *The Credibility of the Gospel History*, in *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner*, vol. 2 (London: William Ball, 1838), 585; F. C. A. Schweigler, *Der Montanismus und die Christliche Kirche des Zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1841), 121; John C. L. Gieseler, *A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, rev. from 4<sup>th</sup>

Examination of the *Passion* reveals that Montanist tenets were expressed throughout the document, in both diaries, the account of the martyrdom, and the editorial framework.<sup>63</sup> The exaltation of the Spirit was systemic in the *Passion* (1.3, 5; 16.1; 21.11); the validity of continuing revelation was asserted by the editor (1.1-5; 21.11); visions were plentiful and available upon demand by the prophets (4.1; 7.2-3); Perpetua's leadership was promoted unabashedly despite her gender; eschatological expectations were expressed by all the participants (1.4; 4.10; 11-13; 17.2); references to Revelation and other Johannine literature were present (4.8; 12.1-7); disciplinary activity, although not prominent, was present in Saturus' vision (13.6); and the use of Eucharistic cheese in one of Perpetua's visions (4.9) paralleled its use by a Montanist sect, the Artotyrites.<sup>64</sup>

Once accepted as the work of Montanists, the diaries of the *Passion*, if not the entire document, become even more significant as the oldest, complete expression of the New Prophecy. As such, they predate the earliest writings from Tertullian's Montanist period by up to four years<sup>65</sup> and his

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ed., trans. Samuel Davidson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849), 195 n. 9; John De Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprint, Lexington, Ky.: The American Theological Library Association, 1965), 44; J. Armitage Robinson, ed., *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, in *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* 1:2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891; reprint, Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 50-52; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne depuis les Origines jusqu'à l'Invasion Arabe*, vol. 1, *Tertullien et les Origines* (Paris: n.p., 1901; reprint, Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), 80-1; Adolf Harnack, *Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1904), 321; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 58; Bigg, 299; B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Church to A.D. 461*, vol. 1, *To A.D. 313* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 186-7; Hans Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Founding of the Church Universal*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 213-4; W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 116-8; Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 77-9; Elaine C. Huber, *Women and the Authority of Inspiration: A Reexamination of Two Prophetic Movements from Contemporary Feminist Perspective* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 21; and Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 177-8.

<sup>63</sup>Rex D. Butler, "New Prophecy and 'New Visions': Evidence of Montanism in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Ph.D. Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 110-83.

<sup>64</sup>Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.1.1. See also de Soyres, 140; and Douglas Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975): 47.

<sup>65</sup>According to Barnes, *Tertullian*, 47, Tertullian's adherence to Montanism began about 207 or slightly earlier.

later writings by as many as eight.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, an examination of the attitudes and practices of Perpetua, Saturus, and the other martyrs represented in the *Passion* could clarify Montanist tenets as they were taught when the movement arrived in North Africa and before it was influenced by Tertullian.

### Martyrs' Power of the Keys

Two incidents recorded in the diaries of Perpetua and Saturus demonstrate that they believed that martyrs possessed special prerogatives. Perpetua related a dramatic story involving her brother Dinocrates, who had died from a facial cancer some time earlier at the age of seven. During a joint prayer time with her fellow Christians, she suddenly spoke her brother's name and realized that, as a martyr/confessor, she had the privilege of interceding for him. That night, she envisioned her brother, still bearing his cancerous wound, in a dark place, where he was dirty and thirsty but could not reach water. When she awoke, she was confident that she possessed the authority to pray for him and did so for several days that she might be granted the favor of her brother's release from suffering (7.1-10).

Then one day, she saw another vision in which she saw Dinocrates clean and refreshed with a scar in place of the wound. This time, he was able to drink his fill of water from a golden bowl and, after doing so, went to play. Perpetua awoke from the vision convinced that her brother, through her exercise of the power of the keys, had been delivered from suffering (8.1-4).<sup>67</sup>

Saturus' contribution to the *Passion* consists of a beatific vision in which he and Perpetua had died and were borne by angels to a heavenly garden (11.1-7). There they came to a place surrounded by walls of light, and, passing through the gates, they encountered a divine being seated on a throne and surrounded by angels singing, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" (12.1-5) When they left through the gates, they were met by the bishop Optatus and the presbyter Aspasius, who were separated from each other and sad. Throwing themselves at the feet of Saturus and Perpetua, they begged them, "Make peace between us, for you have gone away and left us like this." Although Saturus and Perpetua responded to their bishop and presbyter, embraced them, and began to converse with them, angels interrupted the proceeding and rebuked the clergymen, telling them that the martyrs deserved to rest and that Optatus and Aspasius should settle their quarrels themselves. At the close of this episode, the angels chastised the bishop for failure to discipline his congregation and attempted to close the gates (13.1-7).

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 77-8.

In this vision, Saturus demonstrated his belief that the confessor/martyr possessed the power of the keys to mediate peace between Christian factions.<sup>68</sup> Frederick Klawiter interpreted Saturus' vision in this way: "Whatever the full meaning of the episode, it seems to imply at least that one destined for martyrdom has the power of the keys and can utilize it to bestow peace on other Christians. Perhaps, once the martyr enters into peace through death, he or she is no longer to be approached in prayer by Christians on earth. But that view itself rests on the assumption that while alive the destined martyr has the priestly power of the keys."<sup>69</sup>

### Post-baptismal Forgiveness

In Tertullian's thought, his concern over the martyrs' power of the keys was tied to the issue of post-baptismal repentance and forgiveness: to deny one was to deny the other. In the *Passion*, the bestowal of the power of the keys upon martyrs indicated the authority for and, therefore, the possibility of granting post-baptismal forgiveness.

In the case of Dinocrates, his relationship to baptism is subject to debate. Augustine denied the possibility that Dinocrates could have been released from suffering, even through his sister's intercession, if he had not been baptized. Therefore, he concluded that Dinocrates, after baptism, had apostatized before his death.<sup>70</sup> Certainly, under this supposition, Dinocrates benefited from post-baptismal forgiveness.

Klawiter, however, believed that Dinocrates had not been baptized in life and that "[t]hrough Perpetua's intercessory prayers and tears, her brother was pardoned and given the full forgiveness of sins by the living water of baptism, the water which previously had been out of reach because he had died as a pagan."<sup>71</sup> If Dinocrates indeed had died without baptism and Perpetua still believed that she had authority to secure his forgiveness and pardon from suffering, the implication is that she would have expected her authority to avail in the case of post-baptismal sin as well.

Regarding Saturus' vision of the martyrs' intervention on behalf of Optatus and Aspasius, Klawiter stated that the clergyman "have fallen out of fellowship because of sin."<sup>72</sup> The nature of the sin is not made clear either by Saturus or by Klawiter, but clearly the incident is post-baptismal for the clergymen and capable of resolution.

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<sup>68</sup>de Soyres, 141.

<sup>69</sup>Klawiter, 259.

<sup>70</sup>Augustine, *Nat. orig.* 1.10.12.

<sup>71</sup>Klawiter, 258.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.

The support of the Carthaginian martyrs for post-baptismal forgiveness can be inferred indirectly by their abundant borrowing of imagery from the *Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>73</sup> Tertullian rejected this work because he judged it too lenient, though he recognized its usage in the church.<sup>74</sup> Saturus, however, must have accepted its teachings and used it so extensively in the catechesis of Perpetua and her companions that its imagery surfaced in the visions recorded in the *Passion*.<sup>75</sup>

The attitudes of Perpetua and Saturus toward post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys contradicted Tertullian's clear statements in his treatise *De pudicitia*, written well into his Montanist period. On the other hand, Perpetua's exercise of her prerogative in the release of Dinocrates from suffering and the martyrs' authority to resolve the sinful disputation between the clergymen reflected the power of the keys taken up by Themiso and Alexander, leaders of the Montanist movement in Asia, and by the Gallic confessors, who likely had been influenced by proto-Montanism before emigrating from Asia and Phrygia. The martyrs' differences, therefore, lay not with Montanism but with "Tertullianism," that is Tertullian's version of Montanism, reshaped through oracles uttered by Carthaginian prophet(esse)s influenced by his rigorous pronouncements against forgiveness of post-baptismal sin, even through martyrs' authority.

### Voluntary Martyrdom

On the issue of voluntary martyrdom, Perpetua and Saturus both demonstrated agreement with Tertullian. In Perpetua's first vision, she described Saturus as the catechumens' teacher, who surrendered himself voluntarily because he was not present when his students were arrested (4.3). Toward the end of the *Passion*, the editor, who witnessed the deaths of the martyrs, reported that, after the inexperienced executioner missed the mark and struck Perpetua on the collarbone, she actually guided his hand to her throat. Barnes referred to this act as nearly suicide, which the editor warmly applauded:<sup>76</sup> "Such a powerful woman, who was feared by the unclean spirit, was not able to be killed otherwise, unless she herself willed it" (21.10).

In his discussion of Montanism and voluntary martyrdom, Tabbernee passed over Perpetua's final act without comment but did include Saturus' surrender as an example of a Montanist

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<sup>73</sup>In Perpetua's visions, compare the dragon (4.4) with the sea-monster of Herm. *Vis.* 4.1.1-2.4; Pomponius the deacon (10.3-4) with the white-robed lady of Herm. *Vis.* 4.2.1-2; and the green branch with golden apples (10.8) with the fruit-bearing branches of Herm. *Sim.* 8.1-2. In Saturus' vision, compare the transportation of the martyrs to the east (11.2-3) with the transportation of the white-robed woman in Herm. *Vis.* 1.4.

<sup>74</sup>Tertullian, *pud.* 20.2. See also Daly, 129 n. 299.

<sup>75</sup>Butler, 178-80.

<sup>76</sup>Barnes, *Tertullian*, 78.



who gave himself up.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, he did not conclude that Saturus was representative of Montanists in general. As he continued his research into attitudes toward voluntary martyrdom in Carthage, he found that Tertullian, as a Montanist leader in his community, did support voluntary martyrdom along with other Carthaginian Montanists but in opposition to the Catholics. Again, he did not conclude that Tertullian was representative of early Montanism.<sup>78</sup>

Although Tertullian's teachings may not mirror the original Montanist doctrines and practices in every case, it seems likely that Saturus, Perpetua, and the *Passion* did present a clearer picture of the New Prophecy as it was expressed in Asia and exported to North Africa. Therefore, concerning voluntary martyrdom, the evidence in the *Passion* supports the probability that Asian Montanists supported such a practice as did Tertullian and Carthaginian Montanists.

## Conclusion

If the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is the earliest, complete representation of the New Prophecy as it arrived in Carthage, then Tertullian's impact on North African Montanism, or "Tertullianism," can be gauged by a comparison of his writings with those of Perpetua, Saturus, and the editor of the *Passion*. Where there is agreement between Tertullian and the *Passion*, it is likely that he preserved the original Montanist ideals. Where there is contradiction, it is possible that he reshaped the movement through the oracles delivered by Carthaginian prophet(esse)s under his influence.

Asian Montanists, exemplified by Themiso and Alexander, granted martyrs/confessors the power of the keys. Gallic confessors, who came from Asia and Phrygia and evinced Montanist influences, used their prerogative to loose and not to bind. Saturus, in his vision, claimed authority for martyrs to mediate peace in the church, even over ecclesiastical leaders. And, in her vision of Dinocrates, Perpetua used her prerogative as a martyr to loose her brother from his suffering. Tertullian, however, according to prohibitions he set forth in *De pudicitia*, would have denied to these martyrs such authority in contradiction of Montanist tradition.

Tertullian's motivation for restricting the martyrs' prerogatives derived from his rigorous opposition to post-baptismal forgiveness. His quotation of the Paraclete's oracle, however, is not a dependable statement of Asian Montanist belief due to the likelihood that it originated from a prophet(ess) in his own congregation. Therefore, earlier Montanist attitudes concerning this issue can be surmised only from the cited examples where Montanists or those influenced by Montanists exercised the martyrs' power of the keys to loose. Evidently, these martyrs/confessors

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<sup>77</sup>Tabbernee, "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom," 42. Tabbernee said that, aside from Saturus, "The *passio* gives no further instances of voluntary martyrdom . . . ."

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

did not regard post-baptismal sin with the strict rigorism demonstrated by Tertullian. Those involved in the *Passion* preserved the attitudes of Asian Montanists toward both post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys.<sup>79</sup>

Unlike these first two issues, Tertullian and the writers of the *Passion* held the same views on voluntary martyrdom. Saturus surrendered himself; Perpetua guided the death stroke; and Tertullian would have approved of both actions. In his support of voluntary martyrdom, Tertullian cited oracles whose sources were identified as the Paraclete or the Spirit but which probably originated with Carthaginian prophet(esse)s. Because the instructions contained in these oracles correspond with the actions of Saturus and Perpetua, however, they likely follow the original ideals of Montanism, which were expressed in the *Passion*.

Based on this comparison of Tertullian's writings with what is known of Asian Montanism and the *Passion*, Tertullian's impact on North African Montanism can be understood better, at least regarding the three issues examined. Tertullian's opposition to post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys compelled him to extend the rigorism of Montanism beyond the original ideal expressed in Asia and in the *Passion*. In the case of voluntary martyrdom, Tertullian needed only to increase the prophetic support, through the Carthaginian oracles, for the practice that was already present in Montanism when it influenced Saturus, Perpetua, and the editor of the *Passion*. In summary, Tertullian either increased or enhanced the rigorous demands of Montanism, fulfilling his own vision for the New Prophecy in North Africa.

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<sup>79</sup>Klawiter, 259.

# THE LIFE OF PELAGIUS



**James Roberts, Ph.D.**

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All historians bring presuppositions into their work. Whether because of a historical figure whose writings and life inspired their faith or career, or simply because in the course of their studies a particular person came to the forefront of their studies, historians—like all students of history—may treat historical figures and the sources which teach us about them unfairly. If we are not careful, our historical heroes become more and more orthodox in all of their theological beliefs and practices as their theological opponents become increasingly caricatured and shaped into straw men. As much as we Baptists admire the Anabaptists, we must also present them with their blemishes. As much as Presbyterians adore the writings and life of Calvin, they must attempt to set their veneration aside when examining Calvin's opponents' orthodoxy, and especially when his beliefs are being presented to non-Presbyterians.

No intelligent reader will listen to us if we are not fair as historians. Fairness does not mean we as Christian historians do not have an opinion, especially when historical events are judged against the ethical demands of our faith. How do we proceed in a fair manner? Let the sources speak. I came to the Christian faith out of atheism and secular humanism, so names like Luther, Calvin, and Augustine held no special affection—no meaning, in fact—for me until my graduate studies in theology. I was something of a blank slate, and I am thankful for Dr. Daniel Holcomb's encouragement to look beyond Luther to Erasmus, beyond Calvin to Servetus and the Radical Reformation, and beyond Augustine to Pelagius. His faithfulness to the sources was an ideal historiographical methodology, and I am thankful for his guidance in the historical craft. His evaluation of the sources, however, was even more encouraging, due to his love for and dependence upon the Bible that he modeled for and instilled in his students.

## The Life of Pelagius

Much historical knowledge can be gained from a reassessment of the condemnation of Pelagius without judging him solely through the eyes of Augustine's later writings. Pelagius has been maligned as a "heretic among heretics" in most sectors of Christianity in the centuries since he lived. Many scholars have proposed systematic constructions of the theology of Pelagius, both the complicated and the over-simplified. Additionally, historians have attempted reconstructions of the motives of Pelagius and of his primary opponent, Augustine of Hippo.

Examining the life of Pelagius provides a sketch not only of the arch-heretic of the fifth century, but also of the political, social, and theological debates occurring in the Roman Empire during his life. Peter Brown, describing the impact of Pelagius, stated, “The Pelagian controversy has come to be interpreted as, in some way, throwing light on the social and political tensions of the declining Roman Empire.”<sup>1</sup>

## Prior to the Fall of Rome

Probably born around the middle of the fourth century in Roman Britain, Pelagius was either the son of a Roman official who was serving in Britain or of an Irishman serving with the Romans.<sup>2</sup> Several references describe Pelagius as “British Pelagius,” “Pelagius the Briton” (to differentiate from another Pelagius), or “our Briton.”<sup>3</sup> Other hints of Pelagius’s place of birth are found in insults cast his direction. Prosper of Aquitaine at one point referred to Pelagius as a “snake from Britain.”<sup>4</sup> Jerome commented that Pelagius was made “stupid and heavy by Scottish [Irish] porridge.”<sup>5</sup> The British Isles were well integrated into Roman society, making Pelagius’s migration onto the European mainland and toward Rome nothing unusual.

Pelagius’s education level supports the hypothesis describing him as the son of a Roman official, or at least a member of some strata of aristocratic family. He obtained a good Roman education, including knowledge of Greek philosophy, pagan literature, the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, and some knowledge of medicine.<sup>6</sup> Among the Church Fathers cited by Pelagius were John Chrysostom, Lactantius, Rufinus of Aquileia, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.<sup>7</sup> Even after the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius began, Augustine recognized

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Brown, “Pelagius and His Supporters: Arius and Environment,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 19.1 (April 1968): 93.

<sup>2</sup>Georges de Plinval suggested, based upon certain Greek medical terms in Pelagius’s writings, that Pelagius’s father was a Greek doctor who came to Britain prior to Pelagius’s birth; Georges de Plinval, *Pelage* (Lausanne: Payot, 1943), 60.

<sup>3</sup>Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.10; Augustine *Letters* 186.1; Prosper *Chronicle*; Orosius 12.

<sup>4</sup>Prosper, *De Ingratis* 1.13.

<sup>5</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah* 4. One need not infer an Irish lineage from this comment, but simply a proximity to and access to Irish cooking.

<sup>6</sup>John Ferguson, “In Defence of Pelagius,” *Theology* 83 (March 1980): 115; John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1956), 41-2.

<sup>7</sup>Bohlin, 46-50.

the intellectual talents of Pelagius, stating that his mind was “very strong and active” and that he wrote with “much power” and “ability.”<sup>8</sup> Between 375 and 384 Pelagius moved to Rome and was baptized under Pope Anastasius.<sup>9</sup> He studied law but passed up a career in law for a commitment to the church. As Jerome noted, “The world is saved and inheritance and civil suits are plucked from the abyss, because this man, neglecting law courts, transferred to the Church.”<sup>10</sup>

If a positive description of the mental capabilities of Pelagius can be gathered from the writings of his opponent Augustine, other opponents, such as Jerome and Orosius, gave a much less flattering physical description. Orosius referred to him as “Goliath,” “broad-shouldered like a wrestler,” “bull-necked,” and “fat.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to echoing these phrases, Jerome also added that Pelagius walked with the pace of “a tortoise,”<sup>12</sup> and his physical appearance reminded Jerome of “a hound from the Alps.”<sup>13</sup>

Whether due to his intellectual capabilities, aristocratic family background, or spiritual piety, Pelagius soon found himself in the company of wealthy patrons in Rome. Sources differ on the exact nature of Pelagius’s religious service in the Early Church. He clearly was never ordained and did not seek ordination, as his colleague Coelestius did, for both Orosius and Pope Zosimus referred to Pelagius as a “layman.”<sup>14</sup> Likewise, historical sources give no indication of his membership in one of the newly popular monastic communities such as the groups Jerome formed in Palestine. Jerome and Augustine both described Pelagius as a “monk,”<sup>15</sup> however, so his ascetic lifestyle had earned him the reputation as a devotee to a sincerely religious life. Pelagius was aware of the references to him as a monk but had not sought to highlight this title. In Pelagius’s view, each Christian should seek “to possess the virtue of your own personal claim to praise rather than a foreign name which is bestowed to no purpose by Latins on men who stay in the common crowd.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 1.6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin* 2.24; Augustine described Pelagius as having lived in Rome “a very long while.”

<sup>10</sup>Jerome, *Epistles* 50.2.

<sup>11</sup>Orosius, *Apology* 2.31.

<sup>12</sup>Jerome, *Dialogue against the Pelagians* 3.1.

<sup>13</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah* 3.

<sup>14</sup>Orosius 4; Zosimus *Letters* 3.

<sup>15</sup>Jerome, *Epistles* 50.2; Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius* 43.

<sup>16</sup>Pelagius, *On the Divine Law* 9.3.

This serious religious devotion led Pelagius to become a teacher, or private chaplain, to several wealthy Roman Christians. These individuals and Pelagius formed patron-client relationships, in which they supported Pelagius materially and he provided spiritual counseling.<sup>17</sup> Jerome had lived in Rome from A.D. 382 until 385 and had formed similar relationships among the Christian aristocracy, perhaps even meeting Pelagius during his stay.<sup>18</sup> The most prominent known patron shared by these two men was Melania the Elder, an extremely wealthy widow. Melania had committed herself to an ascetic lifestyle in 372, traveling to Egypt and Palestine before returning to Rome in 399.<sup>19</sup> Near the end of the fourth century, Melania shifted her patronage from Jerome, however, and began backing Rufinus of Aquileia after Jerome and Rufinus began debating the validity of the creation and traducian views of the origin of human souls, especially as related to the views of Origen.

Melania's support for Pelagius began after her return to Rome. Pelagius was already a client of Paulinus of Nola, a relative of Melania. Paulinus's wealth enabled him to have a private library, and he often allowed Christians to study and hold public readings from his collections.<sup>20</sup> In Pelagius's role as private spiritual advisor, he demanded much of his Christian patrons. Pelagius believed Christians had no excuse for not living holy lives, for God's grace was able to overcome any sinful inclinations in truly converted Christians.<sup>21</sup> In each of his extant letters, Pelagius called for members of the church to be "without spot or wrinkle."<sup>22</sup> This process occurred because of the grace God gave, although Pelagius understood that the struggle against sin in the life of a Christian may be difficult. "Just as if, for instance, someone who has been swearing regularly now

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<sup>17</sup>This *quid pro quo* explanation oversimplifies the depth and breadth of the patron-client relationships in the ancient Mediterranean world, which were much more involved than modern "employment." For further discussions of the patron-client bond, see John Elliot's "Patronage and Clientage," chapter 7 in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1996), 144-58, or de Silva's work mentioned above.

<sup>18</sup>Jerome, *Epistles* 50.4.

<sup>19</sup>For a detailed description of Melania the Elder's life, see F. X. Murphy, "Melania the Elder: A Biographical Note," *Traditio* 5 (1947): 59-77.

<sup>20</sup>Peter Brown, "Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21.1 (April 1970): 59; Augustine, *Against Secundinus* 11.

<sup>21</sup>Pelagius's *On Nature*, fragments of which are found in the work it prompted Augustine to write, *On Nature and Grace*, confirms Pelagius's view of this matter.

<sup>22</sup>The biblical allusion is to Eph. 5:27; Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 24.3; idem, *On the Divine Law* 1.2; idem, *On Virginity* 11.3.

for a long time swears even when he does not wish to.”<sup>23</sup> The sin the Christian initially embarked upon willingly has become a habit that corroded the innocence of natural humanity. Pelagius’s emphases in teaching, therefore, were to pray and to know God’s Word, for “before one knows what the command is it is impossible to get to know what is to be done.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to his work as a private clergyman for the aristocracy, Pelagius also wrote commentaries on Paul’s letters and worked as an apologist. His teachings, even those responding to Augustine or Jerome, were aimed at defeating threats to the church. Arianism and Manichaeism were the two most common targets of Pelagius’s apologetic works.<sup>25</sup> Along with the heresy condemned at the first two ecumenical councils, the mixture of Zoroastrianistic dualism, Gnostic Christianity, and Platonism was a major concern of Pelagius. “The chief threat to Pelagius’ [*sic*] ascetic programme came from the Manicheans, who, like Pelagius, were popular among the Roman aristocrats.”<sup>26</sup> One early opponent of Pelagius in Rome may have been a Manichaean named Constantius, a former associate of Augustine during the latter’s participation in the religion.<sup>27</sup> In addition to his writings against the Arians and Manichaeans, Pelagius also focused comments in his exegetical works against the Macedonians, Photinians, Apollinarians, Novatians, Marcionites, and Jovinianists.<sup>28</sup> His passion in defeating heresy was apparent not only to the writers of his day, but also to modern reviewers of his work. Martha Stortz noted his determination, “He *rages* against the subordinationism of the Arians, the docetism of the Manichaeans, and Apollinarius’s truncation of Christ’s nature.”<sup>29</sup>

The zeal of Pelagius against heresy in general and Manichaean thought in particular caused the first disagreement between him and Augustine. Several of Augustine’s works, including his early anti-Manichaean works, were among the books Paulinus of Nola held in his library.<sup>30</sup> At one point during a public reading, Pelagius heard and reacted strongly against a line from the tenth

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<sup>23</sup>Pelagius, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* 7.19.

<sup>24</sup>Pelagius, *On the Divine Law* 4.1.

<sup>25</sup>Bohlin, 10.

<sup>26</sup>Theodore de Bruyn, “Pelagius’ Interpretation of Romans 5:12-21: Exegesis within the Limits of Polemic,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (1989): 38.

<sup>27</sup>Augustine, *Against Faustus* 5.5.

<sup>28</sup>Evans, 92.

<sup>29</sup>Martha Stortz, “Pelagius Revisited,” *Word & World* 8 (1988): 137 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup>Augustine, *Against Secundinus* 11.

book of Augustine's *Confessions*: "Give what Thou command and command what Thou will."<sup>31</sup> This helplessness on the writer's part to determine his course of actions sounded like Manichaean fatalism to Pelagius, and in his teachings he began emphasizing the ability of Christians to follow God's law.<sup>32</sup> Concerning Pelagius's zealousness against what he supposed were lingering effects of Augustine's former Manichaean experiences, Augustine stated, "He shows too great a fire against the evil."<sup>33</sup> Soon, events outside of their control would bring these two men, each zealous for orthodoxy, into closer physical proximity.

### After the Fall of Rome

Alaric and his Visigoth tribe would sack Rome in A.D. 410. Most of the aristocracy followed the lead of the Roman government officials and left the city before it fell. Pelagius followed his patrons, including Melania the Elder, across the Mediterranean to Carthage. Augustine had heard mention of Pelagius and the impact he was having on Christian aristocrats in Rome and claimed to hold no ill feelings toward him, only desiring to hear of Pelagius's view of grace firsthand before condemning him.<sup>34</sup> Despite the reaction Pelagius had to the line from his *Confessions*, Augustine heard "great praise"<sup>35</sup> from men such as Paulinus about this "good and praiseworthy man," a "holy man, as I am told, who has made no small progress in the Christian life."<sup>36</sup>

Augustine was not in Carthage when these refugees from Rome arrived and although he returned before Pelagius departed from Carthage for Palestine, he never had the opportunity to discuss with Pelagius their theological differences. Augustine remembered, "On his arrival, however, in Africa, he was in my absence kindly received on our coast of Hippo, where, as I found from our brethren, nothing whatever of this kind was heard from him; because he left earlier than was expected. On a subsequent occasion, indeed, I caught a glimpse of him, once or twice, to the best of my recollection, when I was very much occupied in preparing for the conference which we were to hold with the heretical Donatists; but he hastened away across the sea."<sup>37</sup> Although Pelagius's teachings had not disturbed the North African church during his brief

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<sup>31</sup>Augustine, *Confessions* 10.31.45.

<sup>32</sup>Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance* 20.53.

<sup>33</sup>Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 1.1.

<sup>34</sup>Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius* 46.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 3.5, 3.1.

<sup>37</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 46.



time there, his companion Coelestius was called before the church in 411 and condemned for teaching erroneous doctrine.<sup>38</sup>

Pelagius was not condemned before this council, however, and no mention of him was made in relation to the teachings of Coelestius, because by the time the trial of Coelestius occurred Pelagius was in Palestine, a guest of John, bishop of Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> Even years later, in his response to Pelagius's *On Nature*, Augustine refused to name Pelagius by name and therefore too hastily condemn him for supposed Pelagian teachings, for the bishop of Hippo still believed Pelagius was a Christian, just mistaken on certain points.<sup>40</sup> As much as Augustine opposed Pelagius, he never miscast the heretic's beliefs or "descended to cheap abuse, as did Jerome and Orosius."<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately for Pelagius, Jerome was a resident in his new home, Palestine, and the two men's differing views soon started more heated theological discussion, which eventually drew Augustine back into the controversy.

In 413, at the prompting of one of his former patrons, Pelagius wrote an extensive letter to the Roman virgin Demetrias to discuss her decision not to marry, but rather to seek a life of devotion to God through virginity. Upon reading this letter, Jerome associated Pelagius's teachings with those of his old opponent Rufinus of Aquileia and responded by writing his own letter to Demetrias to warn her of Pelagius's teachings on how, if at all, sin was passed from parents to children.<sup>42</sup> Rufinus had died in 410, and Jerome felt that although the "hydra has at length ceased to hiss at us," the "scorpion" (Pelagius) continued Rufinus's attacks.<sup>43</sup> Pelagius responded to Jerome by writing *On Nature*, and Jerome forwarded this work to Augustine.<sup>44</sup>

Augustine sent a copy of his response, *On Nature and Grace*, to Jerusalem with Orosius, one of his students. With the pressure of Jerome and Augustine on Pelagius, a regional synod was called in Jerusalem in June 415. Orosius stood as the accuser of Pelagius, using Augustine's book as well as a letter of Augustine as the primary evidence against Pelagius's teachings. Those clergy

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<sup>38</sup>Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin* 2.3.

<sup>39</sup>Vittorino Grossi, "Adversaries and Friends of Augustine," in *Patrology* vol. 4, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 464.

<sup>40</sup>Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 1.7.

<sup>41</sup>Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 45.

<sup>42</sup>Jerome, *Epistles* 130.

<sup>43</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel* 1.

<sup>44</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 47.

who had gathered in Jerusalem found Pelagius's explanations of his teaching acceptable, however, and refused to condemn him.<sup>45</sup>

In December of the same year, two exiled Gallic bishops, Heros and Lazarus, brought similar charges against Pelagius in Diospolis in Palestine. A much more complete account of this second regional council exists, for Augustine wrote extensively on his view of the events. Pelagius first sought to distance himself from the more unorthodox teachings of which he was being accused. Augustine charged Pelagius with using vague definitions to take advantage of the language differences between the Latin-speaking parties involved and the Greek-speaking bishops judging the case.<sup>46</sup> Augustine further illustrated this point by producing a letter written by Pelagius to a deacon in Hippo, Charus, after the Synod of Diospolis. In the letter, Pelagius accepted certain statements he had condemned in front of the judges. "I could not help feeling annoyance that he can appear to have defended sundry sentences of Coelestius, which, from the Proceedings, it is clear enough that he anathematized."<sup>47</sup>

Pelagius also sought to garner the favor of Palestinian bishops by casting himself as a student of and friend to orthodox teachers. He claimed his teachings were drawn from Augustine's own mentor, Ambrose of Milan. Augustine answered this claim by showing how Pelagius took Ambrose's teaching out of context, stating that if Pelagius truly agreed with Ambrose "there will remain no further controversy between us."<sup>48</sup> Finally, Pelagius presented letters praising him from respected church leaders throughout the Mediterranean, including a letter from Augustine. "He certainly took much pains to prove that we were well affected towards him, by going so far as to produce even our private letters to him, and reading them at the trial."<sup>49</sup> Augustine stated that his letter was filled with generic niceties, and no special praise was intended. Additionally, he stated that Pelagius "may boast to his heart's content of the friendship of holy men, he may read their letters recounting his praises, he may produce whatever synodal acts he pleases . . . . There still stands against him . . . statements which are opposed to that grace of God whereby we are called and justified."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Orosius, 3-6.

<sup>46</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 1-2; idem, *Contra Julianum* 1.5.19. The vague language Augustine noted was related to Pelagius's definition of "grace," which Augustine claimed was not a biblical or apostolic definition of the term. "This grace, then, which was most completely known in the catholic Church, they supposed Pelagius made confession of"; *Proceedings* 22. See also Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ* 1.38.

<sup>47</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 57.

<sup>48</sup>Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ* 1.47-52.

<sup>49</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 45.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 51-3.

Despite the protests of Augustine's students, the bishops gathered in Diospolis found no reason to condemn the teaching of Pelagius. "Now since we have received satisfaction on the points which have come before us touching the monk Pelagius, who has been present; since, too, he gives his consent to the pious doctrines, and even anathematizes everything that is contrary to the Church's faith, we confess him to belong to the communion of the Catholic Church."<sup>51</sup> Pelagius had been judged orthodox by this local synod. Orosius returned to Augustine after these two incidents with news of both his and the two other bishops' failures to gain a condemnation against the teachings of Pelagius. After hearing the reports on these trials in Palestine, Augustine's opinion of Pelagius began to decline. Coelestius was a heretic, but Pelagius was perhaps a worse heretic, for at least the former was bold and clear. Pelagius, on the other hand, was "reserved" and "mendacious."<sup>52</sup>

In the summer of 416, Augustine took advantage of two local councils in North Africa, one in Carthage and one in Milevis, to present a complete case against Pelagius and Coelestius. Augustine prepared scriptural evidence and made comments on passages in Pelagius's *On Nature* in order to gain a condemnation against Pelagius. Both of these North African councils condemned Pelagius, and these judgments, along with all of the evidence Augustine had presented at the local councils, were forwarded to Pope Innocent.<sup>53</sup> In January 417, Innocent sent three letters to the North African bishops stating that he agreed with the North African scriptural arguments. Pelagius and his followers were to be conditionally excommunicated until they could convince Innocent of their orthodoxy.<sup>54</sup>

Pelagius replied to Innocent's demand for a statement of orthodox belief by claiming, much as he had at the Synod of Diospolis, that he was orthodox. "I say again, that these opinions, even according to their own testimony, are not mine; nor for them, as I have already said, ought I to be held responsible. The opinions which I have confessed to be my own, I maintain are sound; those, however, which I have said are not my own, I reject according to the judgment of this holy synod, pronouncing anathema on every man who opposes and gainsays the doctrines of the Holy Catholic Church. For I believe in the Trinity of the one substance, and I hold all things in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church."<sup>55</sup> After Pelagius's final condemnation, Augustine reflected back on the nature of Pelagius's statements in his letter to

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>52</sup>Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ* 2.13.

<sup>53</sup>Augustine, *Letters* 177.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 181-3.

<sup>55</sup>Augustine, *Proceedings* 43.

Pope Innocent, noting that Pelagius was using vague language again on the manner in which grace aids in humanity's salvation.<sup>56</sup> Also, Augustine felt Pelagius continually raised questions on which he was orthodox to distract from the points at which he was heterodox.<sup>57</sup>

Pope Innocent never received the answer from Pelagius, however. Two months after writing his letters to North Africa, Innocent died. His successor, Zosimus, soon received Pelagius's letters and a profession of faith addressed to Innocent. In September, after reviewing the material from Augustine and Pelagius, Zosimus reversed all of the condemnations of both Coelestius and Pelagius. "Pelagius' profession of faith astonished the Roman clergy and attendant bishops, who could not understand how such a man could be accused of heresy."<sup>58</sup> Coelestius's condemnation in Carthage in 411 was overturned, and those who had accused Pelagius of heresy at the two councils of 415 in Palestine were reprimanded. The two accusers of Pelagius at Diospolis, Heros and Lazarus, actually were excommunicated themselves for their denunciation of Pelagius.<sup>59</sup>

The notices of Zosimus's actions reached Carthage on November 2, 417. The shipping lanes between Rome and Carthage were to be closed from mid-November until March, so the church leaders in Carthage quickly sent a reply, along with further evidence, to Zosimus on November 8, 417. Zosimus's response to these letters from Carthage is dated March 23, 418. In this response, Zosimus stated that he was unconvinced by the bishop of Carthage's reply and once again affirmed Coelestius. Apparently, Coelestius's teachings were the main point of disputation, for Pelagius was not even mentioned in Zosimus's letter.<sup>60</sup> This letter of Zosimus arrived in Carthage on April 29, 418. Neither Zosimus nor the North African bishops were swaying from their positions on Pelagius and Coelestius. The official decision on these issues was settled the day after this letter arrived in Carthage, however. After hearing of Zosimus's reversal of Innocent's decision in November, the North Africans had sent a letter on the matter to Emperor Honorius at the same time they replied to Zosimus. Honorius, apparently alarmed by the news of riots in Rome involving some Pelagian Christians, intervened and condemned Pelagius, Coelestius, and their followers on April 30.<sup>61</sup> At that point, Zosimus also reversed his decision and condemned Pelagius and his colleagues.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Augustine, *Treatise on Grace* 1.32.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 2.19.

<sup>58</sup>J. Patout Burns, "Augustine's Role in the Imperial Action against Pelagius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30.1 (April 1979): 71.

<sup>59</sup>Zosimus, *Letters* 3-4.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.; Burns, 73.

<sup>61</sup>Rees, 141.

Despite the condemnations by the Pope and the Emperor, havens existed throughout the East for Pelagius and his followers. During all of the communication between the various Mediterranean cities, Pelagius had remained in Jerusalem. Although Zosimus's final reversal was distributed to all of the major bishops in the East and the West, Augustine also sent a letter to Jerusalem urging the removal of Pelagius from the city. This action was done in late 418. Pelagius then moved to Alexandria to remain with some of his supporters. Although no official record of his death exists, the common belief is that Pelagius died in 419, soon after moving to Alexandria.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Augustine, *Letters* 190.

<sup>63</sup>Rees, 141.

# BRETHREN OF THE COMMON LIFE



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The Reformation is one of the defining eras in the life of the Church. Such monumental change does not materialize without others laying the groundwork. One such movement emerged in the century preceding the Reformation. It was known as the Brethren of the Common Life.

The Brethren were a lay-led attempt at reforming the Church. They were not the first group to attempt such a task. Prior to their efforts, the Beguines (female) and the Beghards (male) brought some measure of reform to the Church in the eleventh century and the thirteenth centuries respectively.<sup>1</sup> However, the impact of their work faded as their followers lost the zeal of their founders.

The Brethren movement was a revival of these earlier attempts at reform. While essentially a local movement centered around Deventer in the Netherlands, Brethren schools and teachers could be found throughout Western Europe. The aim of these practical mystics was the reformation of the Church through the education of the youth and the instruction of the common people in the fundamentals of Christian living.<sup>2</sup>

The Christ-centered teachings and lifestyle of the Brethren greatly impacted the Church and the Reformation. Through their work, they either directly or indirectly influenced every major character on the Reformation stage.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 1:160.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 113-14.

### Gerhard Groote (1340-1384)

The acknowledged founder of the Brethren of the Common Life was Gerhard Groote (or Greete), born into a wealthy family in Deventer. Deventer was the chief town of Overijssel, located in the south-central part of the Netherlands, and was a center for trade and manufacturing. It was also noted as a place of learning and culture.<sup>3</sup>

Wealth brought the advantage of education. Groote obtained a Master of Arts degree from the University of Paris in 1358 after three years of study.<sup>4</sup> Magic and law were also interests of his at that time. He later continued his education at Prague.

The following years could be described as those of a wandering student/playboy, for Groote's parents had left him quite a fortune upon which to live.<sup>5</sup> To this, he added prebends in Utrecht and Aix.<sup>6</sup> However, when an illness put Groote on what he thought was his deathbed, he ordered his magic books burned and promised God a renewed life.<sup>7</sup> This new life lasted as long as the illness.

It was not until 1374, after several conversations with an old friend, Henry of Calcar, that Groote forsook his wanton lifestyle. He gave up his prebends and allowed righteous women who were not under orders to live in his family's house. Groote kept but two rooms for himself.<sup>8</sup> The women began to share responsibilities and expenses and lived as they thought the primitive church of the New Testament lived.

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<sup>3</sup>E. F. Jacob, "Gerhard Groote and the Beginnings of the 'New Devotion' in the Low Countries," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 3 (January-April, 1952):45.

<sup>4</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>J. M. Neale, *A History of the So-Called Jansenist Church of Holland; with a Sketch of Its Earlier Annals, and Some Account of the Brothers of the Common Life* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), reprinted from the edition of 1858, London, 76.

<sup>7</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 18

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 19.

Shortly afterwards, in December 1379,<sup>9</sup> Florentius van Wevelinckoven, the Bishop of Utrecht, ordained Groote as a deacon and allowed him to preach.<sup>10</sup> Groote embarked upon a preaching tour throughout the Netherlands. As he traveled, he was greatly disturbed by the lifestyles of the priests and monks. Their debauchery, reminiscent of his earlier years, became the focus of his preaching. Groote would address the priests in Latin and the common people in the vernacular because he believed that both the clergy and the laity needed deeper religious fervor.<sup>11</sup>

When he returned to Deventer, Groote gathered twelve disciples around himself and they met in the vicarage of Florentius Radewijns (Floridewijnzoon).<sup>12</sup> This was the beginning of the *devotio moderna*, or new devotion. In addition to their study sessions, the Brethren boarded young school boys. To defray the boarding costs, the youths were assigned the task of copying books which were then sold. Groote's purposes in all this were to increase the number of good books available, to have a profitable means of housing poor youth, and to influence them toward living a holy life through their contact with good literature.<sup>13</sup>

Groote did not spearhead the move toward living in common. It was Florentius, concerned with the expenses of boarding the increasing number of copyists,<sup>14</sup> who came to Groote and asked if it were wrong for those who wished, to live in common, pooling their resources to meet their common needs.<sup>15</sup> Groote feared the reprisal from the monks for such a move and preferred that a monastery, associated with an existing order, be built instead. But Florentius' persistence prompted him to agree to lead such a group.<sup>16</sup> A monastery, affiliated with the Augustinian Canons Regular, was later erected about 15 miles north at Windesheim.

Groote's preaching did not go unnoticed by the priests and monks. They were outraged both by the sermons and the exemplary lives led by Groote and his followers. Their protests and political

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>10</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 76.

<sup>11</sup>Albert Hyma, *The Youth of Erasmus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930), 22.

<sup>12</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 22.

<sup>13</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:154.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>15</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 52.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 52-3.



maneuvering forced the Bishop to silence Groote.<sup>17</sup> He humbly submitted to the ban and retired to Woudrichem (Workum).<sup>18</sup> The short time he spent there was devoted to reflection and writing.

Supporters then came forward and wrote Pope Urban VI, asking that the ban on Groote's preaching be removed. Impressed with Groote's teachings and behavior, Urban agreed. Unfortunately, the plague claimed Groote's life before the Pope's answer arrived, a scant four years into his ministry.<sup>19</sup> The prime mover behind the establishment of the Brethren of the Common Life never saw the realization of his work.

### Florentius Radewijns (1350-1400)

Florentius Radewijns built upon the foundation that Groote had laid. He was born in 1350 in Leerdam and later studied at Prague.<sup>20</sup> Florentius was not the scholar that Groote was, and his frail constitution was prone to illness. His study of medicine often provided him with the means of his own survival.<sup>21</sup>

Florentius lived the simple life. He wore plain clothing, avoided dainty foods and read only those books that he believed would improve his character.<sup>22</sup> As the vicar of the altar of St. Paul in the church of St. Lebwin,<sup>23</sup> Florentius became famous for his preaching in the vernacular. So good were his sermons, that it became customary for those who could write to copy down the sermons he preached.<sup>24</sup> People would come for miles to hear either him or one of his followers preach.

With Groote's untimely death, it fell upon Florentius to organize the first communal home. It was called a brethren-house and was probably formed in the fall of 1384.<sup>25</sup> The first official

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<sup>17</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 77.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>19</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 24

<sup>20</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 82-83.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>22</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 58.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

residence, the 'House of Florentius,' was built in 1391. It also served as a clearing house for placing students into foster homes while at school.<sup>26</sup>

The early organizers attempted to distinguish the brethren-house from a new monastic order. While each person agreed to contribute to support the community, no vows were made and members were free to leave the fellowship if they so chose.<sup>27</sup> The group taught no heresy, had no secret society, and wore no new monastic garments. When disapproving monks pressed Pope Gregory XI to take a side, he supported the Brethren.<sup>28</sup>

In 1398 the plague again visited Deventer. After a number of the brethren died, Florentius and some others fled to Amersfoort, leaving only a few to care for the house.<sup>29</sup> During this self-imposed exile, the pressure from the monks, especially the Dominicans, increased. They continued to accuse the Brethren of founding a new monastic order without permission and cited their common life as proof.<sup>30</sup> Florentius, homesick for Deventer, could not take the pressure. He surreptitiously returned to Deventer, in spite of the continuing plague, and left the fray.<sup>31</sup>

### Gerhard Zerbolt (1367-1398)

It fell upon a new member, Gerhard Zerbolt, to press the case. Zerbolt was born in Zutphen in 1367 and joined the community in 1384.<sup>32</sup> He was an avid scholar. Just prior to his death in 1398, Zerbolt wrote *On the Common Life*, in which he presented his defense of the Brethren.<sup>33</sup>

Zerbolt argued that it was allowable to practice religion privately as well as in a monastery. Zerbolt also asserted that a group could meet for the purpose of addressing and encouraging one another and correcting each others faults as equals. Brethren who were not ordained did not preach to the public, nor did they consider their sessions as supplanting the need for oral confession to a priest.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:156-158.

<sup>28</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 67.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 70-78.

Zerbolt's final argument was that the general public spent too much time reading worthless stories about myths and monsters. The laity should be encouraged to study religious works instead. It was for this reason that the Brethren spoke in the vernacular regarding religious matters and produced religious works in the vernacular. Zerbolt's defense and subsequent papal support finally slowed the attack upon the Brethren.

## Congregation of Windesheim

Groote preferred the establishment of a monastery, where brethren desiring a more disciplined lifestyle could live, to an independent organization. It was his hope that the establishment of a monastery, designed after an existing monastic order, would diffuse the complaints that a new monastic order was being created. He hoped that with some of their number in a traditional monastic setting, some measure of security would be provided for those who chose to remain in the brethren-house. While Groote was not as concerned about the structure of the movement as he was about reform of the church, it was his desire that the Brethren would be a model of how the monastic life should be lived out.<sup>334</sup>

In 1386, two years after Groote's death, some of his followers built a monastery near Deventer at Windesheim to avoid further persecution.<sup>35</sup> It was designed after the Augustinian Canons Regular and adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine in 1387,<sup>36</sup> but the initiates took only the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to the prior.<sup>37</sup> They swore no obedience to the bishop or any other ruler.

Women who desired to live in common were called the Sisters of the Common life. The first group formed was the one that met in Groote's home. A dozen years after the founding of Windesheim at Deventer, the women felt the need to establish a convent. Discipline and devotion had become lax under their first confessor, John Van der Gronde. Upon his death, John Brinckerinck became confessor and led in the organizing of a convent at Diepenveen in 1400.<sup>38</sup> Even though the women began living in common before the men, little source material of their work remains.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:141.

<sup>35</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 82.

<sup>36</sup>Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250-1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 96.

<sup>37</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 84.

<sup>38</sup>John Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 87.

One outstanding characteristic of the Brethren of the Common Life was their obedience to the hierarchy of the Church. This was in evidence during a period in which they were in a self-imposed exile from their monasteries.<sup>40</sup>

From the seventh century, Utrecht had been an independent see and controlled the right of choosing its own bishops. Trouble began in 1423 with the election of a new Bishop of Utrecht. The constituents elected Rodolph de Diepholt as bishop. Pope Martin V (1417-1431) wanted to extend his control over the area in the wake of the papal schism (1378-1417) and appointed Sweder de Culenborgh as bishop in place of Rodolph. When Rodolph's supporters evicted Sweder, Martin put the territory under interdict, forbidding all clergy from performing their functions.

At length, the people demanded that clerics perform their tasks in spite of the papal decree. This proved to be a problem for the Windesheim monastery, which was located within the quarantined zone. While the Brethren knew that Martin had overstepped his authority, they had no wish to disobey their pontiff's degree. Nor did they want to make the people irate by obeying the pope and not providing ministry. Instead, they chose exile from the interdicted territory. In that way they could be obedient without causing offense. The situation was eventually resolved in 1432 when Eugenius IV, worrying over the Council of Basel, allowed Rodolph to return and removed the interdict.

Windesheim became the center of the *devotio moderna*, or new devotion. Its influence spread well beyond the town. Of the forty brethren invested before 1424, half became rectors or priors of other monasteries.<sup>41</sup> With the flow of reformers streaming out of Windesheim to other monasteries, a desire arose to form a fellowship of these reforming centers. This resulted in the founding of the Congregation of Windesheim in the winter of 1394-95.<sup>42</sup> This association grew first by individual monasteries and then by whole chapters. Nearly 100 monasteries in all joined the Congregation of Windesheim.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>40</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 2:146.

<sup>41</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 85.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 130.

The Congregation developed into six families of monasteries.<sup>44</sup> The most influential was the Belgian family. It included Deventer and Zwolle which remained the leading centers throughout the duration of the movement. The other families were the German, Italian, Portuguese, Sicilian, and Genoese.

One of the Brethren converts, Johann Busch, a native of Zwolle, was called to head the monastery of Neuwerk, near Halle. His efforts drew the attention of Pope Nicholas V. In 1451, he instructed Busch to supervise the reform of all the monasteries of the Augustinian Canons Regular in Saxony, Meissen and Thuringia. The influence of this reform extended beyond the Canons Regular to affect the Benedictine, Cistercian, and Premonstratensian orders.<sup>45</sup>

The Franciscans also benefitted from the reform-minded Brethren. Francis of Assis, founder of the Franciscan Order, tried to involve more lay people in the monastic movement. Because of this emphasis on lay involvement, many Brethren became Third Order Franciscans.<sup>46</sup> By 1470, some 82 brethren-houses had associated with them.<sup>47</sup>

In time, the reforming zeal of Windesheim cooled. By the time of the Reformation, the Brethren had separated themselves from the common people they initially sought to educate and became more contemplative. What had once been the stimulus of ecclesiastical learning and reform became a part of the religious structure.

## Admission and Daily Life

Initiates into either the brethren-house or monastery passed through several stages of probation. When one requested admission, he was first asked whether he ate well, slept well, and was willing to yield obedience to the prior.<sup>48</sup> All three had to be answered affirmatively. This process eliminated those who had tendencies toward overly enthusiastic asceticism. The initiate was also asked if he could write and whether he liked to read. If all went well, he was allowed

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<sup>44</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 100.

<sup>45</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 132-4.

<sup>46</sup>Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 51. Third Order members are lay members who are allowed to participate in ministry and wear the order's habit.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>48</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:384.

to stay for two or three months.<sup>49</sup> A second trial period of ten to twelve months followed. The initiate became a full member at the end of this time when, before a notary public and witnesses, he renounced to the Brotherhood all claim to his personal property.<sup>50</sup> If a member left or was expelled due to ill-behavior, he could not redeem his property.

The Brethren arose at three or four o'clock in the morning for prayer and personal devotions on a prescribed passage or subject.<sup>51</sup> Next came daily mass, followed by time spent in manual labor. Since the Brethren preferred good works - either among themselves or toward others, to - contemplation, all who could work were expected to do so. Before work, prayers against temptation were offered and afterward, prayers of forgiveness and thanksgiving.<sup>52</sup> While working, the men would chant the Canticles of David or one of the Psalms.<sup>53</sup>

Meals were eaten in silence so that they could concentrate on the passage of the Bible being read during the meal.<sup>54</sup> Three days a week the men ate meat. Three other days, they were fed eggs, food prepared from milk, and on Friday, they ate a Lenten meal.<sup>55</sup> After supper, there was free time spent in one's room. At eight o'clock there was to be silence and then lights out at eight-thirty.

On Sundays and holy days, the Brethren would give informal addresses.<sup>56</sup> A passage of Scripture was read and a discussion on it would ensue. These sessions were open to the public and would draw good crowds.

The garments worn by the Brethren were dark-gray with the length of the hem indicating the rank.<sup>57</sup> Priests wore them to the ankle and Laics to mid-calf. A black belt and hood completed the outfit.

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<sup>49</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 113.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>52</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:388.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1:389.

<sup>54</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 111.

<sup>55</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:382.

<sup>56</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 112.

<sup>57</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:386.

Each brethren-house contained between twelve and twenty persons. There were usually four priests, accompanied by eight clerks and other laymen.<sup>58</sup> With the laity in the majority, it was not uncommon to have a layman elected as rector.<sup>59</sup> By the time of Pope Innocent VIII (1484-1492), a quota system was placed upon the Brethren. Each house was to have a

“prior as head and twelve canons secular living the common life,. . . and thirteen lay brothers from the noble or knightly estate, of legitimate birth,. . . and twelve lay brothers, to wit commoners, who all shall be members of the said church and house . . .”<sup>60</sup>

The grassroots lay movement, begun without the assistance of the established Church, had become absorbed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

### Teachings of the *Devotio Moderna*

The aim of the Brethren of the Common Life was to bring about a life of piety through a renewed devotion to Christ. This new devotion, or *devotio moderna*, had four primary emphases: living for Christ, studying Scripture, progressing in holiness and growing spiritually.<sup>61</sup>

True religion was to love God and to worship him. Jesus should have the first place in one's heart.<sup>62</sup> This involved more than just following an outward form of religiosity. It involved choosing to turn toward Christ and devote one's life to him. This choice to live for Christ was open to all people.<sup>63</sup>

The Fall produced a bondage to sin, even corrupting human intellect and will. Contrary to the later reformers who held to a strict predestinarianism, the Brethren believed that just enough

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<sup>58</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 96.

<sup>59</sup>Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1971), 42.

<sup>60</sup>William M. Landeen, “Gabriel Biel and the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany,” *Church History* 20 (March, 1951):33.

<sup>61</sup>Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 27.

<sup>62</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 63.

<sup>63</sup>Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, 252-3.

human will remained for a person to reject or respond to God's love in Christ.<sup>64</sup> He was not totally depraved. He was responsible for his choice.

Once the choice to live for Christ was made, a believer was to live a holy life. The laity were as obligated as the clergy to live a holy life. Therefore, the Bible should be studied by both clergy and laity so that everyone would know how to live for Him. The Brethren highly valued the New Testament in general and the Gospels in particular. The Old Testament was seen as less valuable.<sup>65</sup> Groote developed the foundational teachings of the *devotio moderna* using primarily the New Testament and the Fathers, especially Augustine and Jerome, as sources.<sup>66</sup>

The life of faith was not a one time event that resided solely in a mystical, internal plane, but a life-long journey. There needed to be a continual progression in holiness. This desire for sanctification became more apparent the closer one came to death.<sup>67</sup>

Growing in holiness necessitated a change of behavior. Confession before a priest without repentance, a change in behavior, was useless.<sup>68</sup> There needed to be both a personal faith and a public demonstration of that faith; an inward knowledge of self and an outward charity.<sup>69</sup> To the Brethren, love for God was more than simply fighting heresy and vice. It was a response to the love God had shown them. That love impelled them "to apply in every day life the religious inspiration derived from the mystical experience."<sup>70</sup> Love, along with humility, were the crowning virtues.

Groote, Radewijns and Zerbolt all encouraged private meditation for spiritual growth. This allowed the person to examine himself, to contemplate Christ's love and to grow in his understanding of faith. These experiences and insights were often shared among the Brotherhood. Perhaps the most well-known devotional writings coming from the Brethren is Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*.

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<sup>64</sup>Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965), 519.

<sup>65</sup>Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, 259.

<sup>66</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 27-8.

<sup>67</sup>Hyma, *Erasmus*, 34.

<sup>68</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 36.

<sup>69</sup>R. W. Scribner, "The Social Thought of Erasmus," *The Journal of Religious History* 6 (June, 1970):5.

<sup>70</sup>Spitz, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 42.



This focus on Christ did not bring an end to following Church tradition. The Brethren continued to revere Mary, pray to the saints, and believe in indulgences.<sup>71</sup> Purgatory, on the other hand, was not seen as a place of punishment for sin but rather the place where one's works would be tried by fire.<sup>72</sup> However, as Van Engen points out, "this focus on the person of Jesus Christ was so total. . . that there was in effect, if not necessarily in conscious intention, something of a shift toward a more exclusively Christocentric form of piety."<sup>73</sup>

## Education

In order to achieve their goal of both clergy and laity living a holy life, the laity would have to be taught to read so that they could learn for themselves how to live in a holy manner. Probably the greatest accomplishment of the Brethren was their educational reforms.

The invention of the printing press spurred the move into teaching by the Brethren.<sup>74</sup> The chief source of income for most brethren-houses was the copying of books. The printing press reduced the demand for expensive, hand-written books., so the move to education was a natural progression.

Not all brethren-houses had a separate school. Often the brethren would teach at the city school.<sup>75</sup> Students were required to keep a notebook of Christian teachings called a *repiarium*.<sup>76</sup> The teacher dictated the plainest and most helpful sayings from the Gospels and the New Testament in a loud clear voice. This facilitated the memorization of these passages by the students. When they finished school, many students returned to their homelands in Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands, carrying with them the teachings of the *devotio moderna*. Other students provided ready recruits for the brethren-houses or monasteries associated with the Congregation of Windesheim.

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<sup>71</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 144.

<sup>72</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 2:339.

<sup>73</sup>Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 25.

<sup>74</sup>Hyma, *Erasmus*, 29.

<sup>75</sup>Kenneth A. Strand, "The Brethren of the Common Life: A Review Article of R. R. Post's *The Modern Devotion*," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 8 (January 1970):65.

<sup>76</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 93.

Groote was devoted to education, and he influenced the great reformer of education, John Cele. Cele was a native of Zwolle, the site of one of the earliest brethren-houses. He came to Groote for advice on whether or not to join a monastery. Groote discouraged him from taking orders by pointing to the vast need for education among both clergy and laity. Partly through Groote's influence, Cele obtained the rector's position in the city school in Zwolle. He would teach at Zwolle from 1374 or 1375 until 1417.<sup>77</sup>

It was Cele who originated and founded the secondary school system.<sup>78</sup> He divided the school into eight grades, with the last two presenting special studies for the students.<sup>79</sup> Cele taught the quadrivium of grammar, logic, ethics and philosophy, the latter including poetry, elocution, mathematics, and physics.<sup>80</sup> Cele supervised the revival of learning among commoner and cleric alike. In the process, the center of the *devotio moderna* shifted to that town.<sup>81</sup>

While not all of the students were lodged by the Brethren, many of them were. At Zwolle, there were several houses available for students, depending on the student's financial footing. The "House for Rich Boys" housed those boys with means. The "Small House" sheltered the boys whose parents were not wealthy but were able to pay the tuition. Those who paid only a part of their expenses stayed at the "House for the Middle Classes." Boys whose education was totally subsidized lived in the "House for Poor Students."<sup>82</sup> For many of these boys, Cele also provided paper and ink. In spite of all the generosity he showed, Cele made a good deal of money at the school.<sup>83</sup>

After 1475, the center of the *devotio moderna* shifted from Zwolle back to Deventer when Alexander Hegius took leadership of the school there. Hegius melded the teachings of the *devotio moderna* with humanist principles as part of the basis of the Northern Renaissance.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 92-3.

<sup>80</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 1:109.

<sup>81</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 45.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 118-19.

While much of what the Brethren did and taught was absorbed by others, their work in education remains. It was the one enduring aspect of their reform, not only because of the advances in educational practices, but also in the lives of the students they taught who applied the lessons during the Reformation.

## Brethren and the Reformation

The influence of the Brethren with their desire for a holy life, scholarship and religion in the vernacular bore its greatest fruit in the lives of the figures associated with the Reformation. Every major reformer crossed paths with the Brethren. Cardinal Cusa (Cusanus), who exposed the Donation of Constantine as a forgery studied in a Brethren school.<sup>85</sup> The German humanists, Alexander Hegius, Wessel Gansfort and Jacob Wimpheling either studied or taught at Brethren schools. John Calvin, Martin Bucer, Johannes Ocolampadius, Ulrich Zwingli,<sup>86</sup> Philipp Melanchthon,<sup>87</sup> and Johannes Agricola all were influenced by either the teachings of the *devotio moderna* or the educational reforms based upon them. Martin Luther studied at a Brethren school in Magdeburg, and the monastery at Wittenberg was a member of the Congregation of Windesheim.<sup>88</sup> Even those who remained within the Roman Catholic fold were influenced by the Brethren. Erasmus studied at Deventer, and Ignatius Loyola was influenced by Zerbolt, impacting the Jesuits.

The teaching of the Brethren whetted the appetite of these people for something more than formal religion. How the person sought to satiate that hunger differed. Some, like the Brethren themselves, attacked only abuses within the system and not the doctrines or dogma of the Church.<sup>89</sup> Others openly sided with the reformers in attacking the papacy and scholasticism.<sup>90</sup> Whatever the case, the spirit of the Brethren lived on through their students.

The growing friction between the reform movements and Rome led to the decline of the Brethren. They were forced to choose between their loyalty to the Roman Church and the

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<sup>85</sup>Neale, *Jansenist History*, 99.

<sup>86</sup>Kenneth A. Strand, "Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life: The Role of Strassburg," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15 (Spring, 1977):46-49.

<sup>87</sup>Hyma, *Brethren*, 90.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 129, 168.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>90</sup>Hyma, *Erasmus*, 30.

principles of reform and piety which were the basis of their existence.<sup>91</sup> While a number of the Brethren joined the ranks of the reformers, only one community joined it as a group.<sup>92</sup> Those remaining were either forced to accept the stricter, standard monastic discipline or were expelled from their monasteries under Jesuit pressure.<sup>93</sup>

Without Deventer and Zwolle to provide leadership, the movement collapsed. Brethren teachers in the city schools gradually attracted more students than the Brethren-run schools because they offered a broader range of subjects. The last brother-house was erected in 1505 and by 1579 the school at Zwolle had dropped from a high of twelve hundred students to three.<sup>94</sup>

In 1559, the revenues of the Brethren-run monasteries were given to Pope Paul IV. The monks were later driven out of the Windesheim monastery in 1573 by troops fighting the Spanish who controlled the country at that time.<sup>95</sup> Within a span of two hundred years, the outward evidence of the Brethren of the Common Life arose and disappeared.

## Conclusion

The Brethren of the Common Life undeniably impacted the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Church. They were excellent copyists and educators. Yet their legacy resides not in the structures or programs they left behind, but in the spiritual impact they had on both commoner and cleric alike.

First, the taste of spiritual water provided by the Brethren did not simply disappear once a person left the brethren-house or brethren-run school. The desire to continue to live in fellowship with the Author of one's faith must have driven at least some to press on with the life of simple piety taught by the Brethren. This personal reform would lead some to a push for a structural reform of the Church.

Secondly, the Brethren taught that a life of faith was not restricted to "professional" Christians. The laity could experience a vital spiritual life without having to withdraw from daily life. This realization opened the door for reform among the laity. Finally, through education, the Brethren

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<sup>91</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 2:442.

<sup>92</sup>Spitz, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 43.

<sup>93</sup>Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis*, 2:444.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 447.

produced literate clergy and laity who could read and comprehend the ideas espoused by the emerging reformers.

The Brethren of the Common Life did not itself play an active role during the Reformation era. Yet it did provide the tools of scholarship, the training in their use and the personnel to carry out its aim of producing authentic Christianity. Their ministry reminds modern church leaders of the importance and vitality of an educated, empowered laity.

‘PLAN NOT FOR THE YEAR,  
BUT FOR THE YEARS’:  
FANNIE EXILE SCUDDER HECK  
AND SOUTHERN BAPTIST  
PROGRESSIVISM



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In his comprehensive volume on southern progressivism, Dewey Grantham examined the southern social reform impulse that swept across the region in the early decades of the twentieth century. He traced the emergence of progressivism to three central issues: a rising industrialism, the emergence of a new professional middle class, and the dramatic political restructuring that had taken place in the South during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The industrial boom of the New South helped create conditions favorable to progressive sentiments. The first cotton mill in the south was built as early as 1816, but it was not until the 1880s that the textile industry became a force in the southern economy. By the end of the Great Depression the Southeast had eclipsed New England as the world's leader in the production of cotton cloth.<sup>1</sup> Many southerners began to see the rise of industrialism as the panacea for all the South's ills and became uncritical prophets of the "New South Creed." Others observed that the shifts in the southern economy and population not only brought benefits but also new social problems in their wake. From 1900 to 1910 a wide range of reform efforts began to coalesce to form what historians call Southern Progressivism. In the following decade southern reformers increasingly identified their efforts with the national agenda, and many became crucial players in Woodrow Wilson's bid for the presidency.<sup>2</sup>

These southern progressives, critical of the status quo, challenged the traditionalists who resisted government interference in local affairs and advocated for social legislation, touting the

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<sup>1</sup>Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Robert Korstad, and James Leloudis, "Cotton Mill People: Work, Community, and Protest in the Textile South, 1880-1940" in *American Historical Review* 91 (April 1986): 245-85. Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942).

<sup>2</sup>Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), xxi-xxii.

values of efficiency, democracy, social justice, professionalism, and data gathering. Progressives like Walter Hines Page worked tirelessly for reforms in education, health, agriculture, and the railroads. Edgar Gardner Murphy joined Page in the fight for graded public schools, and together they spearheaded the battle against child labor. Belle H. Bennett, Mary Helm, Estelle Haskins, Lilly Hardy Hammond and other Methodist women addressed immigration issues and industrial problems, and worked to improve race relations. George W. Cable and Robert T. Hill battled the convict lease system, and Seaman A. Knapp revolutionized agriculture with his work in the Louisiana rice industry. These and other progressive leaders struggled to impose their vision of justice onto the New South.<sup>3</sup>

Many leaders of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) in the first two decades of the twentieth century were southern religious progressives who encountered the social gospel and, for a brief period, endorsed it in their literature. They established a model Progressive Era institution controlled by women and from that separate sphere molded much of Southern Baptist life throughout the twentieth century. Fannie Exile Scudder Heck was the most visible progressive in the leadership of WMU. Heck served as president of the organization for fifteen years (in non-consecutive terms) between 1888 and 1915. She received the name "Exile" because she was born in Virginia on June 16, 1862—her family "exiled" from their home in Morgantown, North Carolina, because of the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> Although Heck's father served as an officer in the Confederate army, he was able to maintain his financial holdings. After the war, he built his family a mansion in Raleigh, North Carolina. In Raleigh, Fannie enjoyed all the benefits of leisure and education in southern aristocracy. Apparently she was "a crack shot; an expert horsewoman; an accomplished needlewoman; a skilled wood-carver; an artist with brush, pen, and scissors; and an inventor of at least two items."<sup>5</sup>

Fannie Heck never married, but instead brought all her energies to bear on mission work and community service. In addition to serving as WMU president, Heck led the North Carolina WMU as president for twenty-nine years, was chair and founding member of the Associated Charities of Raleigh, vice-president of the Wake County Betterment Association, president of Raleigh Women's Club, member and second vice-president of the Southern Sociological Congress,

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<sup>3</sup>Grantham, xix-xx; Bailey, *Liberalism in the South: Southern Social Reformers and the Progressive Movement* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1969); John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup>Alma Hunt, *History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1964), 31.

<sup>5</sup>Catherine Allen, *Laborers Together with God: 22 Great Women in Baptist Life* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987), 29.

and founder of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. Also, Heck promoted dialogue with Northern Baptists. In 1907 she presided over a joint meeting of Northern and Southern Baptist women at the Jamestown Exposition. She also delivered an address to Baptist women of the world at the Philadelphia gathering of the Baptist World Alliance.<sup>6</sup>

Fannie Heck's biographer described her as a tall, "beautiful," "radiant" woman who "always dressed in perfect taste, often in deep purple."<sup>7</sup> Purple was fitting for a woman who, by the time of her death, had come to occupy a position akin to royalty in the minds of Southern Baptist women. Heck's service profoundly influenced the institutional development of WMU. One reason for her lasting influence was the sheer longevity of her tenure. She served as WMU's second, fourth, and seventh president. She held the office for a total of fifteen years, longer than any WMU president to date. The time she served, combined with her single marital status and financial independence allowed her the freedom to be deeply involved in every aspect of the Union's work. Heck also inspired and guided members of WMU through her writing. In 1906 she founded and edited the first official WMU publication, *Our Mission Fields*. By the time the publication was replaced by *Royal Service* in 1914, circulation had reached 9,000. Heck also wrote the first history of WMU, *In Royal Service*, published in 1913. Fifteen-thousand copies of the book were in circulation by 1915. Local WMU classes studied Heck's history in their meetings for over twenty years.<sup>8</sup> Because of the popularity of *Our Mission Fields* and *In Royal Service*, every member of WMU in the South had access to the pen and mind of Fannie Exile Scudder Heck.

In addition to her extensive work with WMU, Heck participated in a host of community organizations and ecumenical endeavors devoted to social reform. She read the literature of other missionary organizations and kept abreast of the work of social reformers in the North and was familiar with the writings of the social gospel movement. Heck channeled many of the progressive ideas she encountered into WMU literature and programming. In March of 1913 Heck was commissioned by the governor of North Carolina to attend the Southern Sociological Congress—a fledgling organization formed “to study and improve social, civic, and economic conditions in the South.”<sup>9</sup> In 1914, Heck was elected second vice-president of the Congress.

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<sup>6</sup>Fanny Heck, “Editorial,” *Royal Service* (October 1915), 4-5; Allen, *Laborers*, 26-37.

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. W. C. James, Fannie E. S. Heck: *A Study of the Hidden Springs in a Rarely Useful and Victorious Life* (Nashville: Broadman, 1938), 51.

<sup>8</sup>Catherine Allen, *Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham, AL: Women's Missionary Union, 1987), 196.

<sup>9</sup>J. E. McCulloch to F. E. S. Heck, 3 March, 1913. Fannie E. S. Heck Papers, North Carolina Baptist Historical Society, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.



Maud Reynolds McClure, director of the WMU Training School, also attended the Congress as a delegate from the state of Kentucky and served on the Race Relations Committee in 1915. During these meetings, the women were exposed to the leaders of the social gospel and to some of the most progressive ideas of their day. The Congress met annually for seven years, hosting a parade of social gospel thinkers. Northern speakers included such well-known figures as Samuel Zane Batten, Graham Taylor, Walter Rauschenbusch and Charles Macfarland, executive-secretary of the Federal Council of Churches. Southern participants included Atlanta Baptist pastor John E. White, Methodist ministers James E. McCulloch and John A. Rice, and Presbyterian cleric Alexander McKelway, among many others. The Southern Sociological Congress expressed its strongest tie to the social gospel by adopting a social program very similar to that of the Federal Council of Churches. Historian John Lee Eighmy contends that this social program may be “rightly considered a distinctly Southern version of the social gospel.”<sup>10</sup>

Fannie Heck not only participated prominently in the Southern Sociological Congress, she made every effort to bring its message of social reform to her home state. In North Carolina, Heck founded the North Carolina Conference for Social Service, a corollary to the south-wide Congress with basically the same objectives. Her involvement with these organizations enabled Baptist women across the South to have access to some of the most progressive social thinkers of their day. In the pages of *Royal Service*, particularly in the years 1915 and 1916, Southern Baptist women found a solid endorsement of the work of the Southern Sociological Congress and a quiet approval of the social gospel.

*Royal Service* printed reports from the meetings of the Congress and quoted their resolutions concerning such issues as child labor, poverty, inner city slums, health, literacy, and recreation.<sup>11</sup> The editors of *Royal Service* did not hesitate to endorse a clear social gospel agenda with their choices of information from the Southern Sociological Congress. For example, four long paragraphs on the responsibility of the church to conserve public health quoted in a March 1916 issue of *Royal Service* were drawn from a speech made at the 1915 Congress by Samuel Zane Batten, a Northern Baptist minister and strident social gospel advocate. Batten's words are resplendent with the social gospel message.<sup>12</sup> “First,” says Batten, “the churches must teach people

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<sup>10</sup>John Lee Eighmy, “Religious Liberalism in the South during the Progressive Era,” *Church History* 38 (1969): 367.

<sup>11</sup>A full report on the Southern Sociological Congress is included in *Royal Service* (May 1915), 26. See also *Royal Service* (March 1916), 8-14.

<sup>12</sup>Samuel Zane Batten, “Modern Miracles of the Church in Health Conservation,” in James E. McCulloch, ed. *The New Chivalry—Health* (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1915). Speeches given at the Southern Sociological Congress May 8-11, 1915, Houston, TX.

the wide scope of redemption and must make them know that health is a Christian duty.”<sup>13</sup> He continues with an admonition for the churches to go beyond the “results and deal with causes.”

Thus far we have been content to feed the hungry, to nurse the sick, to rescue the perishing, to lift up the fallen. It is all very well to rescue the outcast, but it is better to abolish the white slave traffic. It is well enough to take the sickly child out of the slums; but it is more sensible to abolish the slums. It is well enough to feed the hungry family; but it is more Christian to create an industrial order where every man can earn and eat his daily bread without scantiness and anxiety.<sup>14</sup>

Batten’s words, endorsed by WMU leaders, strike at the heart of a conservative social Christianity. Batten dares suggest that the “industrial order” is to blame for poverty and want. A 1910 Home Mission Board pamphlet analyzed the problems of a Southern mill town and pointed to different sources for hunger and poverty:

This glimpse at the situation will make one ready to believe that these cotton mill companies should not be too quickly criticized for the many undesirable things to be found in the life of the ordinary cotton mill operative. . . . The basal trouble with the average mill operative seems to be that he has lost initiative and enterprise.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Home Mission Board periodical, it is the worker’s own fault that he cannot make ends meet. These phrases reveal the conflict between laborer and mill owner, between the conservative social perspective which lays blame on the worker and the liberal which lays blame on the industrial system. Batten’s position is clear. “It is well enough to build an orphanage;” Batten implores, “but it is more religious to protect machinery and keep the fathers alive. The time has come for us to find the causes of poverty and sickness and deal with these. . . . There is something as foolish as it is un-Christian in nursing sick people and running a hospital when you can keep people well by abolishing bad housing and providing pure water.”<sup>16</sup> Editors of *Royal Service* boldly printed Batten’s final point: “We must realize that this work of preventing social evils is religious and spiritual work.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>*Royal Service* (March 1916), 13.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Victor I. Masters, *Southern Problems for Southern Baptists* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1910).

<sup>16</sup>*Royal Service* (March 1916), 13-14.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

Batten's words stand in bold contrast to the writings of Victor I. Masters of the Home Mission Board who warned against equating social service with redemption, righteousness, or individual conversion. Masters was careful to keep the "gospel" strictly separate from the "good works" of social service. "The Home Mission Board and its missionaries," said Masters, "have done and are doing a work of social service which is of immense value. But they have shrunk from featuring this work as a chief thing, lest the weak and unwary should stumble and become entangled in the net of the false belief that man is justified by the works of the flesh rather than by faith in Christ."<sup>18</sup> This fear of a works based faith prevented Masters and other Southern Baptists from embracing an integrated concept of social service as faith and is one of the theological distinctions between a conservative social Christianity and the social gospel.

Heck and the other leaders of the personal service department made a concerted effort to study the missionary and social service activities of other denominations. In the 1917 annual meeting WMU adopted a resolution concerning personal service "that we study the policies and methods of kindred missionary and social service organizations, adapting those best suited to our aim of preventing and eradicating community evils."<sup>19</sup> Baptist women exchanged ideas with Southern Methodist women more than with any other group outside their own denomination. John Patrick McDowell's work, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939*, demonstrates that Southern Methodist women embraced the social gospel in its entirety.<sup>20</sup>

In 1912 Fannie Heck wrote a postcard to Lulie Wharton highlighting recent Methodist writings concerning race relations. Heck wrote:

I wonder if Dr. Pollard has seen the publications of the Southern Methodist Women along these lines. I think since our organizations so nearly parallel one another in work theirs would be interesting to him. Their recent publication or report of Commissions on work among colored women (a most difficult subject) has interested me.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Victor I. Masters, *The Home Board and Social Service* (Atlanta: Publicity Department of the Southern Baptist Convention, nd.).

<sup>19</sup>*Annual Report* (1917), 93.

<sup>20</sup>John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>21</sup>Fannie Heck to Lulie Wharton, *circa* 1912. Heck papers, WMUA.

The February 1915 issue of *Royal Service* quotes directly from a Methodist Episcopal Church, South leaflet entitled “Plan for Co-operating with Negro Women.” Seven suggestions for co-operation are reprinted in *Royal Service*. In addition to the basic admonishments to establish “negro Sunday School and teacher training classes,” the Methodist leaflet urged white missionary women to keep an eye on education and recreation for children, to create community centers for black citizens, to visit local jails and ascertain “the measure of justice accorded negroes in local courts.” Finally, the article urged the study of housing conditions and “their bearing on sickness, inefficiency, and crime.” In general, the suggestions urged white women to foster “in the local white community higher ideals in regard to the relation between the races; by standing for full and equal justice in all departments of life.”<sup>22</sup>

Fannie Heck not only studied and borrowed from the work of Methodist women, but also respected their contribution to ministry and considered them fellow workers in the Kingdom of God. One of the last stories Heck wrote in the year before she died was entitled “The Pageant of the Golden Rule.” The story was later turned into a pamphlet and advertised as a “Christmas Story” to be recited at local society meetings. The setting is a futuristic America in which the Golden Rule had been applied throughout society. The tone is postmillennial and utopian. Heck’s narrator explains what brought about the change in society. “That is the great lesson we learned from the awful European War. We found that we could not just label money Christian and send it out to make Christians; we had to show what kind of men and women, countries and states Christianity made. . . . Soon we demonstrated . . . that ‘right dealings pay,’ that ‘godliness is profitable.’ . . . The merchants began to take up our methods.”<sup>23</sup> Heck’s narrator continues by naming two specific institutions that had set the example for all of society: Good Will Centers and Wesley Houses. These were the settlement programs of the Baptist and Methodist women. Thus, in Heck’s dream, the Baptist and Methodist women worked side by side to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Protestant reformers capitalized on the new social science methodologies in their ministry at the turn of the century. “Like the secular social workers Protestant sisters gathered information on social conditions during their visits of mercy,” observed one Methodist scholar. “In these activities they were guided by the prevailing belief that the scientific study of society was essential to the . . . establishment of a just order.”<sup>24</sup> Southern Baptist women were no less enthusiastic

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<sup>22</sup>*Royal Service*, (February 1915), 11.

<sup>23</sup>Unpublished manuscript, Heck Papers, NCBHC. Pamphlets published after her death in Baltimore by Woman’s Missionary Union. For advertisement see *Royal Service* (January 1921), back cover.

<sup>24</sup>Mary Agnes Dougherty, “The Social Gospel According to Phoebe: Methodist Deaconesses in the Metropolis, 1885-1918,” in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, ed. *Perspectives on American Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1993): 362.

about social service and the methods of social work. The missions magazine edited by Fannie Heck urged Baptist women to embrace social work. "Christ enjoined social service," pronounced the November 1913 WMU mission study program, "and plainly taught that His treatment of men in the last day would depend on their treatment of each other here."<sup>25</sup> In 1912, *Our Mission Fields* celebrated the history of social service organizations and insisted "all such agencies draw their inspiration and their strength from the example of Christ."<sup>26</sup>

Fannie Heck encouraged Baptist women to study the efforts of social reformers. In notes for a speech Heck praised two women, Jane Addams, the "first citizen of Chicago," and Mrs. Barrett of London, not because they were "suffragists" or "society women" but because they were women "putting their hearts and lives below the lowest and lifting."<sup>27</sup> Although Heck endorsed the work of Jane Addams at Hull House, she and other leaders of WMU were consistently critical of Addams's lack of emphasis on religion. In 1912 Fannie Heck wrote to Lulie Wharton of her initial impressions of Hull House. "I have read this summer, *Seventy Years at Hull House*. The point of view is interesting but I can but believe that Miss Addams has left religion far too much out of her plans."<sup>28</sup> Three years later Maud Reynolds McClure, principal of the WMU Training School, wrote to Fannie Heck regarding her research in social service methods. "We spent much time at Hull House but came away feeling that without the love of Christ as the dynamic . . . such work as that of Hull House is a failure," she reported. McClure and Emma Leachman also investigated both Baptist and Presbyterian church work in Chicago and insisted: "these were much more to our liking."<sup>29</sup>

In spite of McClure and Leachman's disappointment with Hull House's secular approach, they borrowed Addams' ideas for their social ministry. "In one of the clubs at Hull House we heard them planning for gardens in the outskirts of the city where small plots were to be rented at \$1.50 a season," they confided to Fannie Heck. "Later we may be able to get the city to let us use some ground in this way." The physical facilities of the settlements in Chicago also made an impression on the women. "The thing that has taken definite shape as the result of our Chicago trip is our resolve to have a large room suitable for play parties, entertainment of various kinds, etc."<sup>30</sup> Thus, Heck and the other leaders of the personal service department were quick to borrow

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<sup>25</sup>*Our Mission Fields* (October-November-December 1913), 29.

<sup>26</sup>*Our Mission Fields* (October-November-December 1912), 34. See also *Royal Service* (September 1925), 26-27.

<sup>27</sup>Unpublished notes, Heck Papers, NCBHC.

<sup>28</sup>Fannie E. S. Heck to Lulie Wharton, c. 1912. WMUA.

<sup>29</sup>M. R. McClure to Fannie E. S. Heck, 8 February, 1915, Heck papers, NCBHC.

<sup>30</sup>McClure to Heck, 8 February, 1915.

methods and programs of social settlements they visited and blend them with their own brand of southern religion.

Fannie Heck is singularly responsible for establishing a department within WMU which focused attention on social service. In her early years of service on the state WMU level, Heck referred to social work variously as “personal missions,” “neighborhood missions,” “household missions,” or “personal service.” As these terms indicate, Fannie Heck found the impetus for social work within the mandate for missions. At no time did she consider social ministry to be separate from mission work, or in competition with the goal of individual salvation. This attitude harmonizes with that of social gospellers. As Stanley P. Caine notes, the social gospel was “built on the premise that social justice and Christianity were synonymous.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike many Southern Baptists who considered social work to be a secondary task of ministry, Heck consistently emphasized social service as an intrinsic element of the missionary enterprise. Her commitment to social work is evidenced by her early projects with North Carolina WMU. In 1896, she added a “Department of Neighborhood Missions” to the work of North Carolina women that encouraged societies toward “a larger, fuller consecration of self to mission work within the radius of their own neighborhoods.”<sup>32</sup>

Her background in secular charity work, as well as a careful study of welfare organizations in Europe, informed Heck’s approach to social service within WMU. In 1909, during her third tenure as national WMU president, Fannie Heck established a “PersonalService” Department and named Lulie Wharton chairman. Wharton served in this capacity for fifteen years.<sup>33</sup> Wharton and Heck guided the work of personal service through its fledgling years with the help of a personal service committee. They encouraged local WMUs to establish their own personal service committees and to send detailed reports of their activities to national headquarters.<sup>34</sup> State organizations began to form personal service committees in 1911. In 1912, personal service was added to the Standard of Excellence for WMU, requiring societies to participate in personal service in order to meet a rating of “excellence” in WMU work.<sup>35</sup> The national office

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<sup>31</sup>Stanley P. Caine, “The Origins of Progressivism,” In Lewis Gould, ed. *The Progressive Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>32</sup>*Minutes*, Woman’s Missionary Societies, Auxiliary to Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (1898), 16.

<sup>33</sup>The 1925 personal service report to the Annual Meeting of the WMU, SBC offers a farewell to Lulie Wharton as Chairman of the Personal Service Department. *Report*, WMU, SBC, 61.

<sup>34</sup>Allen, *Century to Celebrate*, 215.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*; Hunt, 125.

soon prepared training pamphlets and a *Handbook of Personal Service* for local societies to follow. In 1913, WMU highlighted personal service as part of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of WMU.

The primary writers for personal service for most of the years from 1888 to 1930 were Fannie Heck, Lulie Wharton, Emma Leachman, and Maud McLure. These women were largely responsible for the key resource for personal service work, *A Manual of Personal Service*, later revised as *The Handbook for Personal Service*.<sup>36</sup> They also wrote many training courses to accompany the manual. The initial pamphlet not only provided local societies with basic information on forming a personal service committee, but also offered detailed instructions for organizing Mother's Clubs, hospital work, prison work, work with "shop and factory girls," forming industrial schools, cooking schools, boys clubs, night schools, day nurseries, establishing playgrounds, and even organizing neighborhood entertainment. Fannie Heck and Emma Leachman prepared the first manual. In the revision, the committee lengthened the foreword and asked Maud McLure to reorganize Heck's material as a formal manual for social settlement work.

This set of guidelines was needed because WMU launched a plan to establish centers in poor neighborhoods for missions and social reform. *The Handbook of Personal Service* provided detailed instructions for establishing a Good Will Center which was the Baptist version of a social settlement. In 1912, the doors of a model Southern Baptist settlement house were opened in connection with the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky. WMU leaders urged state and local societies to establish additional settlement programs. In 1918, WMU reported thirty-two Good Will Centers across the South.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

In the summer of 1914, at age 52, Fannie Heck became ill with what most believe to have been cancer. She checked into Hygeia Hospital in Richmond where she lingered in extreme pain until her death fourteen months later. During these months of suffering, Heck continued to be involved in the work of WMU. In the hospital she contributed to *Royal Service* with such volume that the editor wondered how she could think of so much to write.<sup>38</sup> One of her letters to the

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<sup>36</sup>*A Manual of Personal Service* (Baltimore: Woman's Missionary Union Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, c. 1911). *A Handbook of Personal Service* Revised, (Baltimore: Woman's Missionary Union, nd). WMU Archives, Birmingham, Alabama. The plan for Baptist settlement houses drew heavily from the

"City Mission Manual, Woman's Board of Home Missions, M. E. Church South."

<sup>37</sup>*Annual Report* (1918), 55.

<sup>38</sup>Nimmo to F. E. S. Heck, 11 February 1915. Heck Papers, North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, (NCBHC).

editor of *Royal Service* proved to be so detailed that it had to be taken “by subject” and answered in “installments.”<sup>39</sup> The words of her final address as president of WMU, written from her death bed, and read by proxy at the 1915 annual meeting, reverberated across the South. Heck’s closing remarks to the women of WMU are phrased like proverbs. “Be prayerful in your planning,” she advised.

Endeavor to see the needs of the world from God’s standpoint.  
Plan not for the year but for the years.  
Think long thoughts.  
Strive for the conversion of those around you as faithfully as for the heathen.  
Train the children for world-wide service.<sup>40</sup>

This simple charge from a dying president stirred the minds and hearts of WMU members. After her death, Baptist women virtually canonized Heck as a saint. Her obituaries claim that she “expressed the richness of God’s revelation through her writings,” and that the influence of her “consecrated life and personality” would never die.<sup>41</sup> Sainthood notwithstanding, Heck’s passion for social reform bore lasting, visible fruit. While the social gospel emphases faded in the 1920s, a concern for the social ministry remained through the social work programs of the WMU training school. The school educated generations of female missionaries and social workers who accepted paid positions in institutions created and largely financed by WMU. The WMUTS eventually became the Carver School of Missions and Social Work, one of the first accredited schools of church social work in the country.

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<sup>39</sup>Nimmo to F. E. S. Heck, February 11, 1915.

<sup>40</sup>Clippings, Fannie Heck Papers, NCBHC.

<sup>41</sup>“Fannie E. S. Heck: From *The Window of Young Woman’s Auxiliary*,” Clipping, Fannie Heck Papers, North Carolina Woman’s Missionary Union, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Cary, North Carolina.



# INVITATION TO THE NEW CHURCH HISTORY



By Denis R. Janz

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The academic discipline known as church history takes upon itself the study of an impossibly large subject.<sup>1</sup> At one end stands, let's say, the rugged, illiterate agricultural day laborer in first century Galilee who in some way identified himself with the earliest Jesus movement. At the other end, perhaps last Sunday morning, we have the well-heeled, educated American business woman stepping out of her SUV in front of a suburban church, two children and a husband in tow. These are the bookends, from proto-Christianity to post-Christianity. What happened in the interval? Change: the contrast is obvious, stark, almost grotesque. And continuity: these two, plus roughly ten billion human beings in between, have thought it important to orient their lives in one way or another on the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This "in between" is what church historians care about.

Why? Obviously because they see this as being of major importance, not only for current "church people," but for all of us. Calling themselves "Christians," these ten billion individuals have, for better or worse, shaped the course of western history more profoundly than any other group, religious or secular. In large measure, it is precisely this cultural inheritance that has made us who we are. And thus we will never make sense of who we are, or of our current world-historical situation, or of humanity's prospects for the future, without knowing something about it. Church history (to paraphrase Paul Tillich) is in this sense the depth dimension of the present. Without it we are condemned to superficiality.

As a discipline focused on this massive data, church history has existed now for at least two centuries. Its agenda until very recently has been dominated by certain facets of Christianity's

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<sup>1</sup>The original version of this paper was presented as a lecture at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on 20 April 2004. A refined version was published as "Eine neue Agenda für die Kirchengeschichte," in J. Bohn and T. Bohrmann, eds., *Religion als Lebensmacht: Eine Festgabe für Goffried Küenzlen*, (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 22-34. What follows is the revised, ultimate version. I am indebted to my longtime friend and colleague Dan Holcomb who offered early encouragement as I developed my edited work, *A People's History of Christianity*, 7 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005-2008).

past such as theology, dogma, institutions, and ecclesio-political relations. Each of these has in fact long since evolved into its own sub-discipline. Thus the history of theology has concentrated on the self-understandings of Christian intellectuals. Historians of dogma have examined the way in which church leaders came to formulate teachings which they then pronounced normative for all Christians. Experts on institutional history have researched the formation, growth, and functioning of leadership offices, bureaucratic structures, official decision-making processes, and so forth. And specialists in the history of church-state relations have worked to fathom the complexities of the institution's interface with its socio-political context, above all by studying leaders on both sides.

The energy expended on this enterprise has been immense. A century ago it was conceivable that a single individual could acquire the expertise to write an overview of the whole. That day is gone, at least if one is looking for scholarly respectability. I know of no one who can keep up with the current literature. And here I rely on my own experience. I recently resigned from an eighteen-year stint as editor in charge of church history for a scholarly publication. All new books in the discipline were to cross my desk: I was to review them, send them out for review, or discard them. Of course this ideal was never met, even remotely. I estimate that I thumbed through perhaps 2,000 new books during my time as editor. And I personally read and reviewed 163, a number which barely scratches the surface. Even to merely be aware of all that is now being published is a task most of us are not equal to. And after two hundred years of this kind of work, there is no single library in the world that can afford or house the burgeoning mountain of specialized literature.

Increasingly massive tomes continue to appear on increasingly narrow topics. One doesn't have to look far for illustrations. For instance, for some time now we have had available to us a four-volume work on *The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century*.<sup>2</sup> Its importance, the author tells us in volume four, is that it will help us understand the theology of the hypostatic union in the later thirteenth century! Or consider some other examples: There is sufficient background literature on the Chalcedonian dogma of 451 for a lifetime of reading. It used to be that the magisterial treatises of important theologians like Luther were published in critical editions. Today even their marginal scribbles are receiving the same treatment. We have far more information today about the relations of Emperor Charles V and Pope Clement VII than any of their contemporaries had. As this happens – as more and more is written about less and less – one senses that the law of diminishing returns has set in. Even the most rigorous and exacting scholarship in the field is greeted by a noticeably cool reception. Fewer and fewer, it seems, read this literature, and increasing numbers of those who do ask themselves the all-important question, “So what?” “Why is this important?” Is the discipline moving toward a dead

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<sup>2</sup>Walter Principe, *The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century*, 4 vols. (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963-1975).

end? Or is it trapped in the inner lane of a traffic circle, unable to exit?

There are some who think it is, and these often persist in dropping broad hints about the intrinsically boring nature of the subject. Eric Christensen, himself something of a church historian, has issued the indictment as follows:

It is a truth not quite universally acknowledged, although by now it should be, that historians have the duller lives of any authors, the least tempting to public curiosity. They are born. They become immersed in paper. They emit paper. They die. There is little time for anything else. Their characteristic vices (rancor, vanity, and conformity) are not peculiar to them but common to all academics. Their virtues recall the nature films in which Herculean beetles are seen rolling vast globes of dung, 'a hundred times their own body weight.' Their publishers try to make them sound interesting by claiming that their clients engage in unremitting travel, prize-winning, and intellectual innovation. Who cares? What we need to know is why we should read yet another thick book when the supply obviously exceeds the demand.<sup>3</sup>

If we are honest, perhaps we should frankly admit that there is a fragment of truth in this. Who among us cannot have noticed the collective yawn that seems these days to greet any public mention of church history?

And yet, it is also true that dreary tomes, scholarly narcissism, erudite nitpicking, and turgid prose have in themselves never been enough to kill any discipline. We need only to ask our colleagues in literary criticism or sociology about this. No, valid as these complaints are, the true Achilles heel of traditional church history lies elsewhere. We can begin to see precisely where when we ask the simple question whether this massive body of scholarship has missed anything. Has some aspect of the whole been left unstudied? Has any stone been left unturned?

The answer is yes.

## New Directions

The fact is that this discipline has told the history of Christianity as the story of one small segment of those who have claimed the name "Christian." What has been studied almost exclusively until now is the religion of various elites, whether spiritual elites, or intellectual elites, or power elites. Without a doubt, many of the saints, mystics and theologians, pastors, priests, bishops and popes of the past are worth studying. But at best they all together constitute perhaps five percent of all Christians over two millennia. What about the rest? Does not a balanced history of Christianity demand that attention be paid to them?

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<sup>3</sup>Eric Christiansen, "A Fine Life," *New York Review of Books*, 47 (Nov. 2000), 30.

Besides the issue of imbalance, there is also the issue of historical injustice. Ever since history was born as a professional academic discipline two centuries ago, it has been fixated on the “great” deeds of “great” men, and little else. What was almost always left out of the story, of course, was the vast majority of human beings: almost all women, obviously, but then too all those who could be counted among the socially inferior, the economically distressed, the politically marginalized, the educationally deprived, or the culturally unrefined. For various elites to despise these people was nothing new. Cicero, in first century BCE Rome, referred to them as “urban filth and [dung].” Thirteenth century Dominicans, commissioned to preach to them, referred to them as the “stulta” – the stupid. In the sixteenth century, the Paris theological faculty agreed that when Jesus spoke of casting pearls before swine and dogs in Mt. 7:6, he was referring to the laity. In eighteenth-century London, Edmund Burke called them the “swinish multitude.” Throughout Western history, this loathing of “the meaner sort” was almost universal among the privileged. Historians from the nineteenth century on perpetuated this attitude if not by outright vilification, then at least by keeping these people invisible. Thus to pay attention to them now is not only to correct an imbalance, but in some sense to redress an injustice, to re-humanize these masses, to reverse this legacy of contempt.

The new church history tries to do this. It insists that “church” is not to be defined first and foremost as the hierarchical-institutional-bureaucratic corporation; rather, above all, it is the laity, the ordinary faithful, the people. Their religious lives, their pious practices, their self-understandings as Christians, and the way all of this grew and changed over the last two millennia – this is the subject matter. In other words, the new church history is a “people’s history.”

Thus this disciplinary reorientation stems in part from the historian’s quest for balance as well as from her/his sense of justice.

## New Methods

It is one thing to ask new questions about the past and quite another to develop ways to answer them. Difficult as this may be, it is unavoidable: a disciplinary reorientation necessarily entails methodological innovation. Disciplines are not generally born with full-blown, highly sophisticated, neatly laid out methodologies. Rather these develop slowly, sporadically, incrementally, by trial and critique, by willingness to set aside well-worn approaches and to take chances on new ones. The path to disciplinary maturity is by its very nature a messy and painful one. Those who chart the growth of the natural sciences can attest to this. The novel field of study before us is now experiencing precisely this. Methodologically speaking, it is beyond its infancy, but certainly not yet out of its adolescence.

The detritus of the past that has washed down to us and that we can study can be classified into two basic types, literary and material. Conventional historians have most often sought to understand the past through its literary remains. The problem here, of course, is that the extant written sources for at least the first 1,700 years of Christian history are almost always the products of elite culture. As such they give us access to the religious lives of nothing more than a tiny

minority. The illiterate masses simply did not leave to posterity a clear account of their beliefs, values, and devotional practices, let alone their unspoken longings, fears, joys, and sorrows.

For this reason the new church history increasingly turns its attention to material survivals of the past, to the interrogation of artifacts rather than literary texts. Not that these are transparent: like literary texts, they must be “read” with great caution, with the so-called “hermeneutic of suspicion.” Thus, for instance, the discovery of toys which children of Christian families played with in the late ancient world gives us tantalizing hints about parental values and maybe even about how this neglected segment of the Christian people was socialized into the community. So too, the archaeological uncovering of modest homes with tiny chapels and altars from this same period is suggestive. Women’s jewelry from Christianity’s Byzantine branch may well indicate distinctively feminine devotional practices. What is the significance of the communion rail, introduced into church architecture in fifth century North Africa? Can one infer from this, as some now do, that parishioners madly rushed to the altar to receive communion when the time came? The exhumation of medieval bodies in peasant cemeteries has led to the discovery of ubiquitous “grave goods”: surely this indicates something of the religious consciousness of the laity. But what is notable in each of these examples is that we are not operating here in the realm of proof or fact or certainty. Rather, until methods are refined and research is broadened, we remain in the realm of hints, indications, suggestions and probabilities.

Important as material culture is for the new people’s history, this venture can by no means abandon the literary remains of the past. For one thing, while it is true that the vast majority of lay Christians over the last two millennia have been illiterate, there are exceptions, and their writing must be attended to carefully. Then, too, we have graffiti from semi-literate laypersons. And illiterate believers at times dictated letters and wills and epitaphs, or gave transcribed testimony in courts of law, and so forth. Few and fragmentary though they may be, such sources allow us at least a peek into the popular Christianity of the past.

The writings of various elites within the church also retain some considerable importance for a people’s history. What is required is not the abandonment of these documents but rather new ways of reading them. Practitioners of the new church history refer to such approaches as the “tangential,” or “oblique,” or “regressive,” or “mirror” reading of texts. The most promising writings to be considered are those which are in some way addressed to the laity. And the researcher’s question in every case is not “What is the author trying to say?” but rather, “What can we infer from the text about popular piety?”

### **New Issues: Power, Sex, and Politics**

The new church history is built on the assumption that a meaningful and helpful distinction can be made between “elite” and “popular” (or whatever other labels one chooses to apply). Already in their formative stages, religious groups, like all social groups, differentiate themselves into leaders and followers. The process is similar, whether it took place yesterday as the neighborhood ten-year-old boys organized themselves into a baseball game, or in the first century in Galilee

as the earliest Jesus movements took shape. And it seems to happen no matter how egalitarian the initial impetus to group formation was. Religious groups in their earliest stages often have an informal, spontaneous, charismatic leadership. If these groups survive, this is inevitably institutionalized, formalized, and professionalized at some point. When it is, it makes sense to distinguish between elite and popular within the group.

Reversing the bias of conventional church history, we now intentionally sideline the various leaderships and elites. And yet, paradoxically perhaps, as we do this we also focus on them again, albeit in a new way. For, while popular piety is given center stage, it cannot be understood in a vacuum. From the basic distinction between popular religion on the one hand, and elite/clerical/official religion on the other, there immediately arises the crucial question of how these two interact with one another. And thus, inevitably and unavoidably, the issue of power relations confronts us.

To state the obvious, leaders at every point try to lead. Working on the assumption that they know what is best for the rest, they try to influence, sometimes to dominate, even to control. In Christianity, they instruct on what should be believed; they try to form consciences, inculcating values and moral standards; they work to shape attitudes; they advocate for a particular lifestyle; they admonish, exhort, enjoin, warn, dissuade, implore, cajole, reprove, and harangue. All this is done in countless ways, but most directly perhaps in sermons, catechesis, confession, counseling, and so forth.

And to what effect?

Here no simple answer is possible. It may be that at certain points in the history of Christianity, ordinary Christians accepted official church teaching, moral instruction, and the like, almost in its entirety. No significant gulf separated clergy and laity when it came to these matters. In this case, official religion and popular religion nearly coincided. This was, in fact, the tacit assumption of earlier generations of church historians. Today, as the study of popular religion progresses, there appear to be fewer and fewer persuasive examples of this scenario.

Far more often in the history of Christianity, we find evidence that everyday Christians said “no” and resisted: in these cases, popular and official religion obviously diverged, though to varying extents in different contexts. This “no” spoken by popular religion to elite religion could take the relatively mild form of indifference. Thus in fourteenth-century Western Europe, for instance—as the church hierarchy emphasized that missing Sunday mass was a mortal sin and threatened punishment temporal and eternal, physical and spiritual—attendance hovered around 50 percent (if we are to believe reports of village priests).

But the laity’s “no” could also take the form of stubborn resistance. For instance, village priests in thirteenth century France complained that no amount of haranguing could convince their illiterate peasant parishioners that fornication was a mortal sin. At its most extreme, saying “no” could even take the form of physical violence. Take for example the Peasants’ Revolt in England in 1381. Hoards

of peasants rampaged through the countryside. When they arrived in towns, they sought out the local bishops and beheaded them – a rather vehement repudiation of official religion. Whatever the level of resistance, popular religion does not always buy what elite religion is trying to sell.

Most commonly, perhaps, in the history of Christianity, the people have said a simultaneous “yes” and “no” to their leaders. Absolute refusal to follow is rare: its result is schism and new group formation in which virulent anti-clericalism inevitably gives way sooner or later to a new clericalism. Blind following is even more uncommon: the image of mindless masses eagerly embracing pronouncements and proscriptions from on high bears virtually no semblance to reality.

We can illustrate aspects of this question of power relations by focusing for a moment on the history of Christian attitudes toward human sexuality. Today, on this score, we have more questions than answers. For instance, why did the church hierarchy struggle so mightily, for so many centuries, to control this aspect of the lives of the laity? In the case of marital sexuality, why did the clergy go to such great lengths to regulate when, how, how often, and so forth? Did Christianity, as some now suggest, really develop into a sex-hating religion by the end of the Middle Ages, or was this only the clergy? Did the progressive demonizing of sexuality in the Middle Ages have anything to do with the growing enforcement of the celibacy rule for priests? To what extent did average Christians adhere to the magisterium’s rules, such as the absolute prohibition of sex during Lent? Was the insistence on detailed confession of sexual “sins” to celibate priests really about sex, or power? Many of these questions may be largely unanswerable today, with the present state of scholarship. What is notable about them is, first, that they are the kind of questions which drive current research and discussion, and second, that in every case they focus our attention on the nexus between the popular and the elite. In a “people’s history,” the problem of power relations is inescapable.

It should immediately be added that these elementary reflections on power barely scratch the surface. Experts would immediately ask, for instance, whether such a binary schema is really adequate to the complexity of the issue, or whether the assumption of a one-way influence can account for the data. Practitioners of this new church history who have begun to focus on this know that we are entering here on an issue of massive complexity. How power within religious groups is negotiated, conferred, wielded, and so forth, or how the location of power migrates within a group – these are the fascinating questions which people’s historians of Christianity have barely begun to formulate, let alone answer.

Wherever there is a power differential between members of a group, there is also of course politics. In this sense, church politics becomes the subject matter of the new kind of Christian history. We care about official statements emanating from the World Council of Churches, for instance, but only insofar as they make a difference in the lives of ordinary believers. We pay attention to who was made pope in 2006, but only if we suspect this will impact the religiosity of the Catholic laity. When church leaders made decisions in the past, we ask in every case whose interests were served by those decisions. Thus the new church history is political in the sense that

the church politics of the past is thematized.

But it is also political in another sense, and this should be openly acknowledged. Church history in the old style was never “objective,” or value free, or apolitical. “Sides” were always chosen. Standing with the “official” Christianity of leadership elites, traditional historiography portrayed popular piety for the most part as emotional, irrational and superficial – a hopeless bog of sub-Christian superstition, indifference, and stubbornness. Surely “the church” was justified in its massive efforts throughout history to inform, influence, mold, shape, dominate, domesticate, and control this. And surely we church historians are justified in ignoring it.

The new historiography also chooses sides. It starts with the assumption that the elites may have been wrong, that popular piety in fact may have a validity of its own, that it may be an authentic manifestation of this religion centered on Jesus of Nazareth, that it may be worthy of our attention after all. In this sense, people’s history is slanted, biased, and yes, disrespectful, even subversive perhaps.

### New Results?

What, finally, is to be gained by this new venture? What outcome can we anticipate? Practitioners of the discipline must, in all humility, admit that at this early stage, it’s far too early to say. Perhaps in a generation or in a century, lines of development which we can now barely glimpse will appear obvious to our successors.

One thing that can already be said, however, is that the new portrait of Christianity’s past will be vastly larger and more detailed than the current one. The chapter on the fifth century, for instance, will not be able to ignore Augustine’s reflections on the mediation of grace, but neither will it dare to omit those Christians who tied fox-claw amulets onto the body for healing. Or take accounts of the thirteenth century, for example. Perhaps the intellectual achievement of Thomas Aquinas will still be featured prominently. But what about the vast majority of Christians in his day who had never heard of him? What about the Italian peasants who, we are told, admired Thomas greatly, not for his intellect or his sanctity, but for his remarkable girth and stature? And should not at least some space be given to the thirteenth-century peasant village in the Auvergne, where the cult of St. Guinefort, the holy Greyhound, flourished? So too, balanced treatments of the sixteenth century, while they couldn’t ignore Luther and Calvin, would have to inquire into religious life in peasant villages, where the Gospel of John was still read in the wheat fields, to ensure a good harvest. And perhaps space should be allotted to the English farmer who had faithfully attended his parish church for thirty years, but who, when asked by his vicar, still could not say the Lord’s Prayer, nor, for that matter, how many persons comprise the Trinity? (And what about the disillusionment of the vicar, to whose sermons he had listened for thirty years?) All this and very much more will be part of the new picture. If today we have mainly close-ups, what we can anticipate is that the camera will pan out to show us a panorama, and it will do this somehow without losing the fascinating micro-historical detail.



But far more is involved here than merely the accumulation of additional data. Historians are not simply collectors of facts about the past, or chronologists, or antiquarians. The mass of data must be interpreted. The search for meaning and direction in human history, for the contours of a narrative – surely this is what makes it significant. Put differently, the historian's goal is understanding. Mountains of fresh data about the past are worthless unless they lead to a new, more integrated, more adequate, more “true” comprehension of the past, one which then informs and deepens our self-understanding in the present.

The shape of that new plot, if you will, is not yet apparent. But there are already signs that the old one is loosening its grip on the discipline. Take for example the growing discontent among church historians with the traditional periodization. The conventional division of Christian history into New Testament-Patristic-Medieval- Reformation-Modern may have been appropriate for the history of theology, it may still provide us with handy divisions for the sake of course requirements, but is it helpful for understanding the history of Christianity, especially now when we can no longer ignore “the people”? If, for instance, lay piety is made the central theme of the narrative, does it really make sense to posit some borderline between “medieval” and “Reformation”? The frequency of such questions today indicates that we are in a transition. The old configuration is crumbling, and the new has not yet appeared.

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PART III

THEOLOGY  
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*‘But you are a chosen generation, a royal  
priesthood, a holy nation, His own special  
people, that you may proclaim the praises of  
Him who called you out of darkness into His  
marvelous light’*

I Peter 2:9

# Baptists and the Priesthood of Believers



By J. Terry Young

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He is a former colleague of Dr. Holcomb at NOBTS.*

Those who don't read history are vulnerable to some huge blunders. In June 1988 messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention passed Resolution Five, calling into question the importance of the priesthood of believers and alleging that it had only been a marginal idea to Baptists in the past. The resolution was blind to Baptist history and theology.

The controversial resolution was aimed at promoting authority for pastoral leadership. The insistence upon authority in pastoral leadership is contrary to the doctrine of the priesthood of believers.

Surely, a pastor must be a leader. Leadership requires vision, and the ability to plan, communicate, organize, promote, enlist, inspire, and motivate. If one has these abilities, authority adds nothing to him as a leader. Without these things, all the authority in the world cannot make the pastor a leader.

The power play for authority is questionable at best. It certainly comes at too high a price if we have to forsake nearly four centuries of Baptist commitment to the priesthood of believers.

Baptists have always placed a major emphasis on the priesthood of believers, religious liberty, and soul competency. These ideas are not identical, but they are closely related. The preamble to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message states, "Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer," linking these three ideas. The 2000 revision uses similar language.

Baptists take this cluster of ideas very seriously because they feel that they are scripturally based. Each person is made in the image of God, according to Gen. 1:26-27, meaning that humans are made in relationship with God—we can sense the leadership of God and can express ourselves to God.

We are made so that we need no intermediary to stand between us and God. From the theological perspective, this is called soul competency, meaning that all persons are capable of approaching God directly, without interference or the assistance of an intermediary. From the political-sociological perspective, this is called religious liberty, meaning that all persons have full freedom to worship--or not to worship--according to their own interests and needs, with no coercion from the state, the church, or individuals. From the standpoint of ecclesiology, this is

called the priesthood of the believers, meaning that believers are united in the corporate body of the church, with each fully sharing in the rights and responsibilities in the functioning of the church.

## A Major Baptist Emphasis

Many have called competency of the soul, with its corollaries priesthood of the believer and religious liberty, Baptists' most important contribution to the world. Cyril Eastwood probably has authored the most extensive and intensive study of the idea of the priesthood of believers (2 volumes, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, and *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful*).<sup>1</sup> He concludes that "the doctrine of the priesthood of the believers is not incidental but central in Baptist theology."

The idea of the priesthood of believers is virtually inseparable from our Baptist doctrine. In *The Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* Barry Garrett says that the priesthood of believers is "a concept fundamental to an understanding of the religion of Christ."<sup>2</sup> He finds at least seventeen points where the priesthood of believers relates to basic Baptist doctrine.

There is no more basic belief to Baptists than the idea of the priesthood of the believers, or in broader terms, the competency of the soul. It is one of the foundation stones upon which all of our other doctrines are based. The Bible assumes throughout the competency of the human soul, the capability of each person to hear and respond to God. If this premise were not true, the redemptive story that unfolds in the Bible would have to be expressed very differently.

Historically, the Baptist story is studded with numerous examples of a courageous defense of the principle of the priesthood of believers. Virtually all our confessions of faith have spoken pointedly in support of religious liberty, the right of a free conscience before God for every person.

The priesthood of the believers sets forth both the privileges and responsibilities of Christians. The responsibilities and the privileges of the believer are integrally related. They are two sides of the one coin; neither can be maintained without the other.

Where does this doctrine come from? In part, it comes from the fundamental fact of the unique creation of humanity in the image of God, recognizing the innate competency of the

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<sup>1</sup>Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day* (London: Epworth, 1960; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1962) and *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful: An Investigation of the Doctrine from Biblical Times to the Reformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>W. Barry Garrett, "Priesthood of Believers," in Norman Wade Cox, *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 1113.

soul. In part, the doctrine of the priesthood of the believers is based on Scripture passages such as 1 Peter 2:5,9; Exodus 19:5-6; Revelation 1:4-6. In addition, Ephesians 3:11-12 and 1 Timothy 2:5 also support this doctrine. However, this doctrine is more basic than a few texts which may be cited. The priesthood of believers is more like a golden thread which runs all through Scripture from first to last.

There is a scarlet thread of redemption, to use W. A. Criswell's analogy, that runs throughout Scripture. Similarly, there is a golden thread of soul competency which runs throughout the Bible; it may not be directly stated at every point, but to remove the idea of soul competency would fundamentally change the context of what the Bible says. To remove either thread would cause the whole gospel story of Scripture to unravel. From first to last the Bible is a book about God's redemptive nature and work, and it everywhere assumes the competency of the human individual before God.

These three terms--soul competency, religious liberty, priesthood of believers--are not synonymous, but are broadly overlapping or interlocking. The three terms each refer, from a slightly different perspective, to the same fundamental idea that the human person is made with inalienable rights in a relationship of privilege/responsibility before God. While these terms are not synonymous, they are so interrelated that to call into question any one of them is to jeopardize the other two.

Baptists have been strong proponents of these three ideas. No one among Baptists has given better expression to these ideas than has E. Y. Mullins. He saw very clearly the interrelationship of the three concepts.

E. Y. Mullins may be the single most important theologian in Southern Baptist history. He was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899-1928). He also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1921-24) and of the Baptist World Alliance (1928). Some have noted that Mullins had little to say regarding the priesthood of believers in his book, which is regarded as his basic systematic theology, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (1907).<sup>3</sup> But the companion volume, which deserves to be called volume one of a two-volume treatment of theology, gave emphatic development of this idea which Mullins found to be fundamental to any understanding of the Christian faith. *The Axioms of Religion* (1908)<sup>4</sup> gave extensive treatment to the idea of soul competency. Everything written in his volume on systematic theology was written upon the premise of soul competency which was so fully developed in *The Axioms of Religion*.

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<sup>3</sup>Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1917).

<sup>4</sup>E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1908).

Mullins declared, “The sufficient statement of the historical significance of the Baptists is this: The competency of the soul in religion.”<sup>5</sup> Mullins saw soul competency, which he also called priesthood of the believer and religious liberty, to be an axiom, a truth so basic as to need no proof, so obvious that any intelligent person will agree to it after reasonable consideration. He no more needed to develop this thought than he needed to prove the existence of God before discussing the doctrine of God.

Religious liberty, for Mullins, is the inevitable counterpart of soul competency. Religious liberty is a very deep, fundamental part of the Baptist understanding of Christian faith. “With Baptists, religious liberty is born of the direct vision of God. . . . Always it has been a passion deep as life welling up from the depths of being in eternal faith and hope.”<sup>6</sup>

Religious liberty, or soul freedom, was no minor emphasis with Mullins. “Religious liberty rests upon man’s original creation in God’s image. The purpose of God in creation did not appear until the dust stood erect in the form of man, as a free and self-determining being.” Mullins described many aspects of soul competency, concluding “this is the being and these the endowments which demand that great boon we call religious liberty.”<sup>7</sup> Mullins was here using the term religious liberty, but he was equally describing soul competency. For him, the terms were interchangeable.

Mullins also saw that soul competency is integrally related to priesthood of the believers. Mullins wrote, “Let it be noted further that the steps we have already traced lead directly to democracy in church life and the priesthood of all believers. The competency of the regenerated individual implies that at bottom his competency is derived from the indwelling Christ. Man’s capacity for self-government in religion is nothing more than the authority of Christ exerted in and through the inner life of believers. . . . Democracy in church government is an inevitable corollary of the general doctrine of the soul’s competency in religion. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

Mullins would allow no religious creed or confession of faith to stand between the individual conscience and God. “Religious liberty excludes the imposition of religious creeds by ecclesiastical authority. . . . But when they are laid upon men’s consciences by ecclesiastical command, or by a

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>6</sup>E. Y. Mullins, “The Baptist Conception of Religious Liberty,” *The Life of Baptists in the Life of the World: 80 Years of the Baptist World Alliance*, edited by Walter B. Shurden (Nashville: Broadman, 1985), 57. This was a sermon preached by Mullins to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Stockholm, 1923.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 55f.

form of human authority, they become a shadow between the soul and God, an intolerable yoke, an impertinence and a tyranny.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Priesthood of Believers in Early Baptist History**

Baptists, from their earliest days, have made a strong emphasis upon religious liberty and the priesthood of believers. John Smyth, the first Baptist leader we can call by name, called the church “a kingly priesthood,” citing 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6 as support (1608). He disallowed any mediator between God and human persons.

Many notable Baptists have given prophetic witness for the competency of the soul, or religious liberty and the priesthood of believers, either by pointed word or dramatic deed. That is not to say that soul competency was their sole agenda, for it definitely was not. But, religious liberty was very important to them.

Thomas Helwys set forth the doctrine of religious liberty in his book, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612). The book was dedicated to King James I with the blunt reminder that the king is just a man and not God, and only God has any authority over the souls of men. For this courageous action Helwys died in prison.

John Bunyan (1628-1688), became a lay Baptist preacher and later a Baptist pastor, defying the spiritual and civil authorities over him. He spent years in jail as a result of his commitment to religious liberty.

Roger Williams (1603-1683) defied church authorities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as an expression of religious liberty and the rights of his own conscience under God. He left the Massachusetts Bay Colony and went to Providence, Rhode Island, where he established the first Baptist church on American soil.

William Carey (1761-1834) defied the authority of the religious leaders in England, became a Baptist and, acting on the Holy Spirit’s prompting of his conscience, was almost singlehandedly responsible for beginning the modern era of missions.

Luther Rice (1783-1836) and Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) were both en route to missionary appointments under the authority of other religious groups when, independently, aboard ship, they became convinced that they should become Baptist. They dared to cut all their ties with the groups sending them out and became Baptists, following the convictions of their hearts rather than the religious authorities over them.

In 1651, in what is now Newport, Rhode Island, John Clarke, John Crandall, and Obadiah Holmes visited the home of an aged, blind Baptist by the name of William Witter. The three

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 59.

were arrested for conducting an unauthorized worship service as they ministered to Witter. All three were jailed. Clarke and Crandall were fined and released. Holmes was fined and publically whipped.

Henry Dunster, a Baptist, the first president of Harvard University, was forced from office and forced to flee from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1653 for refusing to have his fourth child baptized at birth.

Between 1768 and 1777, eighty-three Baptist preachers in Virginia were victims of persecution, with forty-four of them suffering prison terms, for the “crime” of preaching Baptist beliefs.

Baptist commitment to the competency of the soul and religious liberty is clearly seen in the major Baptist confessions of faith. Seven Particular Baptist Churches in London issued the First London Confession of Faith (1644). It is considered a major Baptist statement because it comes so early in Baptist history and so strongly influenced later confessional statements. This confession clearly points out Jesus as the one and only Mediator between God and humans, calling believers “a holy priesthood.” It refers to the democratic nature of the church. While recognizing the leadership of pastors, it also says each member of the church is to minister to all who are a part of the church; every believer is a priest or minister. This confession put forth a strong declaration of liberty of conscience, declaring that God’s people must follow their conscience under God, not human authorities when there is a conflict of those two.

A second English Baptist confession was the Standard Confession of 1660. It too had a strong statement concerning liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

Another very important early Baptist confession of faith was the Assembly or Second London Confession of 1677 and 1688. It declared that God alone is Lord of the conscience. It contained words that finally found their way into the Baptist Faith and Message of the Southern Baptist Convention. “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the Doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or not contained in it.”

The Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742) was the first Baptist confession of faith written in America. It followed the Second London Confession of Faith, as revised by Elias Keach, and was influential on many Baptist churches and associations. It continued the emphasis on religious liberty and freedom of conscience enunciated in the Second London Confession.

The New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833) is the second major Baptist confession of faith in America. It was patterned after the Westminster Confession of Faith (Calvinist) and did not deal with religious liberty or soul competency as such.

When Southern Baptists drafted the Baptist Faith and Message in 1925 and revised it both in 1963 and 2000, they followed the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, but added a strong statement on religious liberty.



## Nineteenth-Century Baptist Theology

Four theologians in the nineteenth century were very influential in shaping the theology of Baptists today. These four each wrote significantly concerning the priesthood of believers, religious liberty and the competency of the soul.

J. L. Dagg (1794-1884) was perhaps the first Southern Baptist theologian. He was professor of theology and president of Mercer University. In addition to his *Manual of Theology*, which he called “First Part,” Dagg also wrote *Church Order: A Treatise*, which he considered to be the completion of the earlier volume on theology. Dagg referred to the idea of the priesthood of the believer as the doctrine of “individual responsibility,” by which “every man feels that the cause of Christ is in some measure committed to him.”<sup>10</sup> Dagg allowed nothing to stand between the believer and his Lord. “The church is not a body intermediate between him and Christ; but he himself is in part the church, and to him belongs the obligation of honoring his divine Master.”<sup>11</sup>

Dagg was strongly committed to the rights and responsibilities of believers, collectively and individually, and to the democratic nature of the church. He stressed the spiritual nature of pastoral leadership, based upon God’s power, not human devices or positions. The pastor is to lead through his godly life and the power of God’s word as he preaches it.

Dagg was very clear and forthright in warning against attributing some power or authority to the pastor in distinction from other believers. “Immense mischief has resulted from the ambition of the clergy . . . . To counteract its influence, Christ commanded his disciples, ‘Be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.’”<sup>12</sup>

James P. Boyce (1827-1888), founder and first chairman of the faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, had little to say about the priesthood of the believer in his massive *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, his basic theology textbook.<sup>13</sup> But it is risky to draw conclusions based upon that fact. That hardly means he forsook the two hundred years of Baptist history before him. For neither did Boyce have a chapter on the church or the Holy Spirit in a book of forty-two chapters and 493 pages! Were the church and the Holy Spirit were minor, insignificant doctrines for Boyce? (He gave approximately three pages to the subject of

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<sup>10</sup>J. L. Dagg, *Church Order: A Treatise* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1871), p. 276. Dagg considered this volume as the concluding volume to the work he began in his *Manual of Theology* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), iii.

<sup>11</sup>Dagg, *Church Order*, 276.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>13</sup>James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887).

the Holy Spirit in a chapter on the trinity.) The virgin birth was scarcely mentioned. Is this also marginal? Boyce stood in a historical tradition clearly marked by commitment to the priesthood of believers. He made no remark in his theology to suggest that he questioned it.

Boyce was the motivating factor behind the preparation of the Abstract of Principles, the doctrinal statement of faith of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The statement was actually written by Basil Manley, and almost certainly reflects the views of Boyce as well. Article VII cites Jesus as “the divinely appointed Mediator between God and Man” and Article XVIII is a ringing declaration of the liberty of conscience, saying “God alone is Lord of the conscience; and He hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men.”<sup>14</sup>

## Twentieth-Century Baptist Theology

E. Y. Mullins is said by many to be the single most important theologian in Southern Baptist history. His views were cited above.

Mullins insisted on the inalienable right of each person to have direct access to God for himself, and to have an equal voice in the church. “Men, redeemed by Christ, regenerated by His Spirit, born of Divine power and grace, are capable of dealing directly with God. Each one has a right to a voice in religious affairs. God speaks directly to men. Even the humblest believer may be a channel of the highest divine wisdom. Democracy, or self-government in the church, is the New Testament ideal. All believers are entitled to equal privileges in the church.”<sup>15</sup>

Walter Thomas Conner is the most important theologian in Southern Baptist life, if E. Y. Mullins is not. Conner was professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, from 1910 until 1949.

Conner may not have given extended treatment to the idea of the priesthood of believers, or the competency of the soul, as Mullins put it. But his writing was saturated with the principle. He cited, approvingly, Mullins’ view of the competency of the soul under God in religion as “the chief distinction of the Baptist view of religion.”<sup>16</sup> Conner held that “every Christian is directly responsible to Christ as Lord and Master.” He warned, “Let no man dare come between the individual believer and his Lord. Every one of us shall give account of himself to the Lord (Rom. 14:9-12), not to pastor, the priest, nor the bishop. Before the Judge of all the earth, men stand on a common level.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>*The Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* is included as Appendix B in the reprint edition of *Abstract of Systematic Theology*.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>16</sup>Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman, 1945), 271.

Conner dealt with the idea of the priesthood of the believer, though not using the term, as he described the Bible as an authoritative word addressed to humans. But for Conner, even biblical authority “. . . respects the nature of man as a free personal being. Man’s conscience, freedom, and reason must not be over-ridden.”<sup>18</sup>

The priesthood of believers and democratic congregational authority go hand-in-hand for Conner. “To the extent that the church departs from a democratic organization and government, to that extent does it cease to be Christian in its principles and life.”<sup>19</sup> Conner would have nothing of clerical authority limiting the priesthood of the believer; this grew out of his profound respect for the Lordship of Christ. “To recognize his (Christ’s) lordship in the spiritual realm is inconsistent with recognizing the authority of the priest or bishop or pope in the realm of religion. The Christian cannot recognize any master in the spiritual realm, in the realm of conscience, without to that extent denying the Lordship of Jesus.”<sup>20</sup>

The democratic principle of the church is grounded in “the fact that our primary relationship is to Christ, not to men . . . The same truth is involved in the doctrine of salvation by grace. . . . No form of church life is consistent with the doctrine of salvation by grace except one that is democratic in spirit and/or principle.”<sup>21</sup>

The doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer is another major reason why Conner was a strong advocate of the idea of the priesthood of the believer. “The Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian to make known the will of Christ, not simply in the official class of the church. There is no class in the church that has a monopoly on the indwelling Spirit of God. . . . A democratic government of the church is based on the assumption that the Spirit dwells in all believers, and that a man’s understanding of the will of God is limited by his spiritual perception and not by his official position.”<sup>22</sup>

Conner may not have given extended treatment to the subject of the priesthood of believers in any one place. But it is obvious that the idea was neither minor nor marginal to his theology.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 275.

<sup>18</sup>Walter Thomas Conner, *Revelation and God* (Nashville: Broadman), 98.

<sup>19</sup>Walter Thomas Conner, *Gospel Doctrines* (Nashville: Broadman, 1925), 125.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Thomas Conner, *Christian Doctrines* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937), 267.

<sup>21</sup>Conner, *Gospel of Redemption*, 275f.

<sup>22</sup>Conner, *Christian Doctrines*, 268.

Few would not agree that George W. Truett has been our greatest pastor-preacher-statesman. For forty-seven years Truett was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, building a mega-church in a day when there were no mega-churches as we know them today.

Perhaps Truett's best known sermon, at least in its prominence in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention, was his address from the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., on May 16, 1920. This was in a mass rally held just prior to the opening of the Southern Baptist Convention in its annual session. In this address, Truett was introducing Southern Baptists to the nation. The central burden of this message was religious liberty. "Indeed, the supreme contribution of the new world to the old is the contribution of religious liberty. This is the chiefest contribution that America has thus far made to civilization. And historic justice compels me to say that it was pre-eminently a Baptist contribution. The impartial historian, whether in the past, present or future, will ever agree with our American historian Mr. Bancroft, when he says: 'Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists.' and such historian will concur with the noble John Locke who said: 'The Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty.'" <sup>23</sup>

The rights and privileges of the individual before God were very important to Truett, as important as any point of his theology. "The right to private judgment is the crown jewel of humanity, and for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown rights of the Son of God." <sup>24</sup>

The priesthood of believers, or religious liberty, is not a recent idea for Baptists, according to Truett. "Baptists have one consistent record concerning liberty throughout all their long and eventful history. . . . They have forever been the unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil. . . . Our contention is not for mere toleration, but for absolute liberty. . . . God wants free worshippers and no other kind." <sup>25</sup>

Truett found that the Baptist commitment to religious liberty is one of our foundational principles, not an after-thought or incidental idea. This commitment to unqualified religious liberty is grounded in the "absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ." <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>George W. Truett, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," in George W. Truett, *God's Call to America*, (New York: George H. Doran, 1923), 32.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 32f.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

Truett found that any human attempt, even in the name of Christ and the church, to stand between the individual soul and God “. . . is to the Baptist mind a ghastly tyranny in the realm of the soul and tends to frustrate the grace of God, to destroy the freedom of conscience, and terribly to hinder the coming of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>27</sup>

Truett could hardly have found stronger words to spell out the principle of soul competency, or religious liberty, to the nation as he spoke from the Capitol steps.

Say it again, Dr. Truett. Some were not listening.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 37.

# BAPTISTS, ANTI-CATHOLICISM, AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



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**Author's note:** *Over the years, Dad has stressed to me the significance of ideas in the shaping of history. I have shared his interest in intellectual history and, in this essay, highlight issues, such as religious liberty, competing interpretations of the Baptist tradition, and the relationship of Baptists to the broader culture, that mirror some of his own interests. As such, this essay is a gift to the one who has not only been a wonderful father, but also an ideal role model of the Christian teacher/scholar.*

## Introduction

Central to the narrative of Baptist history is the struggle for religious liberty and the separation of church and state. As dissenters from the Anglican Church in early seventeenth-century England, Baptists made passionate pleas for freedom of conscience. Consequently, Baptists frequently faced persecution for their radical notion that “men’s religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man.”<sup>1</sup>

This heritage of religious liberty carried over into colonial America, where Baptists were some of the most vocal critics of state church establishments. Led by John Leland and Isaac Backus, Baptists in early America influenced the inclusion of protections for religious freedom in the Bill of Rights. Future Baptist leaders continued to trumpet the complementary convictions of religious liberty and separation of church and state. In the twentieth century, Baptist statesman George W. Truett echoed this commitment to a “free church in a free state” as a hallmark of the Baptist identity. Indeed, the commitment to religious freedom became so coterminous with the Baptist story itself, that E.Y. Mullins once wrote that “there has never been a time in their history, so far as that history is known to us, when they wavered in their doctrine of a free Church in a free State.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, (1612), ed. by Richard Groves (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 53.

<sup>2</sup>E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Griffith and Rowland, 1908), 189.

This Baptist legacy has been contested in recent years. Some scholars argue that while Baptists did advocate for liberty of conscience, their commitment to separation of church and state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America was driven as much by anti-Catholicism as it was theological principle. Constitutional scholar Philip Hamburger has recently argued that there was an evolution of Americans' understanding of religious liberty during the nineteenth century that was driven in large measure by Protestant nativism. According to Hamburger, the growing fears of Catholicism led Protestants to "elevate separation of church and state as an American ideal."<sup>3</sup> Others have charged contemporary Baptist scholars with historical revisionism by seeking to "isolate" Baptists' "defense of religious liberty" from their "opinions about Catholicism."<sup>4</sup> A closer examination of the historical record, as well as the writings of Baptist leaders, betrays an anti-Catholic animus that influenced their church-state views, according to these scholars. In short, Baptists and other Protestants advocated a high wall of separation as a defense of "Protestant America" against the perceived threats of "rum, Romanism, and rebellion."

The first three decades of the twentieth century provide a unique context for examining these contentions. Rapid urbanization and immigration, World War I, political radicalism, and the progress of modernity brought social, cultural, and political tensions to the United States. These included conflicts between traditionalists and progressives, immigrants and nativists, and Protestants and Catholics that in many ways culminated in Catholic Al Smith's presidential candidacy in 1928. It was this era that also produced some of Baptists' most noteworthy statesmen such as pastor George W. Truett and theologian E.Y. Mullins. Their sermons and writings continue to be cited as classic expositions of the Baptist commitment to religious liberty and church-state separation. While Truett and other Baptists understood Catholic theology and polity to be threats to both civil and religious liberty, their characterizations of Catholicism served primarily as a useful tool to highlight the Baptist tradition. Moreover, their defense of the Baptist tradition enjoyed both a historical continuity and contemporary relevance independent from their views of Catholicism.

### George W. Truett and Religious Liberty: A Contested Legacy?

From his position as pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, George W. Truett became a denominational leader both for Southern Baptists and Baptists worldwide. It was in this role that Truett eloquently articulated the hallmarks of the Baptist faith including Baptist

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<sup>3</sup>Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 201-02.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher L. Canipe, "A Captive Church in the Land of the Free: E.Y. Mullins, Walter Rauschenbusch, George Truett, and the Rise of Baptist Democracy, 1900-1925" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2004), 239, footnote 66; see also Lee Canipe, "The Echoes of Baptist Democracy: George Truett's Sermon at the U.S. Capitol as Patriotic Apology," *American Baptist Quarterly* XXI (December 2002): 415-431.

commitments to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Truett's 1920 address on "Baptists and Religious Liberty," delivered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to an estimated crowd of 10,000 people, has frequently been cited as one of the most eloquent expressions of the Baptist tradition of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. In his address, Truett articulated the "fundamental Baptist principles" of the "Absolute Lordship of Christ," the Bible our Rule of Faith and Practice, adult believer's baptism, and congregational polity. His litany of Baptist distinctives is followed by a call for Baptists not to forget their commitment to a "free church in a free state." In what is likely the most frequently cited passage from Truett's address, he reminds his audience that "Christ's religion needs no prop of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported is a millstone hanged about its neck."<sup>5</sup>

Less frequently cited, however, are Truett's numerous critiques of Catholic theology and polity that appear in the address. "The Baptist message and the Roman Catholic message are the very antipodes of each other," Truett declared. "The Catholic doctrine of Baptismal regeneration and transubstantiation is to the Baptist mind fundamentally subversive of the spiritual realities of the gospel of Christ." "Likewise," Truett continued, "the Catholic conception of the church, thrusting all its complex and cumbrous machinery between the soul and God . . . is to the Baptist mind a ghastly tyranny in the realm of the soul and tends to frustrate the grace of God, to destroy freedom of conscience, and to hinder terribly the coming of the Kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

In this and other addresses, Truett regularly utilized this juxtaposition of the Baptist and Catholic theological traditions as a useful conceptual tool for his advocacy of the Baptist tradition of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. In doing so, Truett was following a longstanding tradition of anti-Catholic polemics found in Protestant literature dating back to the Reformation. Baptists historically had utilized protest theology all the more fiercely because of their persecuted status. Thus, one can find the Catholic Church attacked as the antithesis of true faith and often equated with the "Beast" of the Book of Revelation. John Smyth's *The Character of the Beast* (1609), for example, was characteristic of the invective aimed at both the Catholic Church and the Church of England by Protestant Dissenters. Throughout the piece, Smyth identifies the Church of Rome as the "false church" and criticizes the Church of England for practicing infant baptism and thus not truly separating themselves from the "Papists."<sup>7</sup>

In explicating the Baptist tradition of soul liberty, Truett condemned Catholic views of baptism and transubstantiation as "subversive to the spiritual realities of the gospel of Christ."

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<sup>5</sup>George W. Truett, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," reprinted in *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Winter 1998): 72.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>7</sup>John Smyth, "The Character of the Beast," in H. Leon McBeth, ed. *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1990), 19-20.



The practice of infant Baptism, in any religious tradition, frequently received the scorn of Truett. Describing infant baptism as “unthinkable from every viewpoint,” Truett further declared that infant baptism “carries within it the germ of persecution, and lays the predicate for the union of church and state, and that it is a Romish tradition and a corner-stone for the whole system of popery throughout the world.” Truett further opined that infant baptism was all that kept Protestants from joining in Christian unity. “If all the Protestant denominations would once and for all put away infant baptism,” Truett concluded, “the unity of all non-Catholic Christians in the world would be consummated and that there would not be left one Roman Catholic Church on the face of the earth at the expiration of the comparatively short period of another century.”<sup>8</sup>

### The Early Twentieth Century American Context

Truett and other Baptists’ views must be understood in the context of a pre-Vatican II Catholicism. During the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in Europe became increasingly defensive and reactionary due to anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical threats from the forces of nationalism, liberalism, socialism, and secularism. The Catholic response included Papal pronouncements that attacked the separation of church and state as well as the “absurd proposition” that “liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone.” In 1864, Pope Pius IX issued the famous Syllabus of Errors in which he warned against the dangers of “progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.” Equally erroneous was the idea that “the Church ought to be separated from the State,” according to Pius. In general, during the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church stood against most liberalizing political movements in Europe and frequently aligned itself with more authoritarian governments.<sup>9</sup> These developments culminated in Vatican Council I where the dogma of papal infallibility was proclaimed.

It is important to note that these statements from the Catholic Church came largely out of perceived threats from European movements and regimes. And, somewhat ironically, these reactionary statements came at a time when a number of noteworthy American Catholics, such as Archbishop John Ireland, celebrated the compatibility of American liberal democracy and the separation of church and state with the Catholic faith.<sup>10</sup> Despite these reassurances, nineteenth century papal and conciliar pronouncements exemplified for Truett and many other Protestants of his day the spiritual autocracy of the Catholic Church and the potential political tyranny it possessed as well. For Truett, the doctrine of papal infallibility, in particular, boldly illustrated the

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<sup>8</sup>Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 70-71.

<sup>9</sup>R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World: Since 1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 598-601; Marc D. Stern, “Blaine Amendments, Anti-Catholicism, and Catholic Dogma,” *First Amendment Law Review* 2 (Winter 2003): 172-74.

<sup>10</sup>James Ireland, “Catholicism and Americanism,” in *Church and State in American History: Key Documents, Decisions, and Commentary from the Past Three Centuries*, ed. by John F. Wilson and Donald L. Drakeman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003), 141-42.

important differences between Baptists and Catholics. “That was one of the astonishing events in all history,” Truett declared, “when the Vatican Council, by a majority vote, decreed the dogma of papal infallibility.”<sup>11</sup>

World War I also had a profound impact on Americans’ understanding of the world and what they perceived as threats to American freedoms. For Truett and other Baptists of his day, Germany and its autocratic regime “bent on world domination” represented the chief threat to freedom. In response, Southern Baptists thoroughly embraced the patriotic fervor and idealistic goals of the War. For many Southern Baptists, it was no coincidence that the war president, Woodrow Wilson, was a Southerner, a Protestant, and a Democrat. Since Baptists were champions of democracy in both church and state, many stood with W.O. Carver in his belief that “God had commanded America to destroy German autocracy and to carry civil and religious democracy to the world.”<sup>12</sup> In an article entitled “Baptist Theology and the New World Order,” Baptist theologian and seminary president E.Y. Mullins contended that the degraded aspects of civilization could be “corrected through the adoption of Baptist principles.” Among these was a Baptist democracy that would replace the political and religious autocracy of the Old World. Moreover, “Baptists would sunder the church-state ties of the Old World.”<sup>13</sup> The destiny of Baptists was echoed by Truett when he stated that “democracy is the goal toward which all feet are traveling whether in state or in church.”<sup>14</sup> The anxieties brought on by World War I encouraged Baptist statesmen such as Truett to often conflate Baptist principles with American democracy. Such an uncritical embrace is certainly theologically problematic.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, World War I represented for Truett a contest between the principles of freedom and autocracy, a contest the outcome of which would impact both political and religious freedom.

Moreover, it was not uncommon for Truett to quickly transition from a denunciation of political autocracy to religious absolutism. “Autocracy must pass, autocracy political and autocracy religious,” Truett continued, “and with it will go sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, the grave clothes of a moribund and decadent faith.”<sup>16</sup> For Truett, the Baptist tradition, with

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<sup>11</sup>George W. Truett, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today,” Presidential Address to the Sixth Baptist World Congress in Atlanta Georgia (Nashville, Tenn.: The Sunday School Board, 1939), 5-6.

<sup>12</sup>James J. Thompson, Jr., *Tried As By Fire: Southern Baptists and Religious Controversies of the 1920s* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>13</sup>Thompson, *Tried As By Fire*, 12.

<sup>14</sup>Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 84.

<sup>15</sup>See Canipe, “A Captive Church in the Land of the Free,” 258-78.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

its emphasis on freedom and democracy, was the antidote to the problems of autocracy not only for the church, but also the state. And his suggestion that the Catholic Church harmed or “impoverished nations” was a common Protestant refrain dating back several decades in American life.<sup>17</sup>

Significant societal changes were taking place in America that no doubt colored Baptists’ perspectives as well. Rapid immigration and urbanization had been changing the character of the nation, and by the 1920s a clear divide emerged between rural and urban society. Catholic immigration enhanced an already healthy distrust of cities on the part of most Southern Baptists in the early twentieth century. Even the pastor of a downtown First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas exhibited a rural bias. For Baptists such as Truett the cities represented veritable dens of iniquity where materialism, vice, and corruption flourished. As early as 1911 in a Baptist World Alliance address, Truett identified urbanization and immigration as two of the “manifold perils” that threatened America. “We are menaced,” Truett declared, “by our vast and fast-growing cities. . . . The challenge for our civilization and the test of our Christianity are these same cities.”<sup>18</sup> As one reads Truett’s address, however, it becomes clear that the so-called “lawlessness,” “frivolities and vanities,” “craze for amusements,” and “divorce mills” of urban America were in large part due to what he considered the “the alien populations of the world with their strange customs and beliefs and ideals and sentimentalisms.”<sup>19</sup> Truett’s views were shared by other Baptist leaders who frequently contrasted the “images of immorality, lawlessness, and corruption” of the cities with the virtues of rural living. As one scholar concluded: “There could be no mistake . . . America’s cities were havens of evil and the enemies of everything cherished by rural Americans.”<sup>20</sup>

Truett’s fears of “the alien population,” namely Catholics, contributed to his longstanding support for prohibition during his career. This was the area of Truett’s most consistent social/political advocacy. He travelled throughout the country in support of the ban on liquor sales. Truett’s vigorous advocacy was reflected in his characterization of alcohol as “still the great enemy of decent civil government, the Gibraltar of bad politics in America. It is political harlotry for the state to go into the business of legalizing the liquor traffic.”<sup>21</sup> In his speeches supporting

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<sup>17</sup>John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 103.

<sup>18</sup>George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” *Baptist Standard* (October 5, 1911): 2.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>20</sup>Thompson, 170-71.

<sup>21</sup>“Dr. Truett Makes Vigorous Appeal to American People to Retain 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” (October 22, 1933), untitled newspaper clipping, George W. Truett Collection, A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, file 275.

Prohibition, Truett typically focused on the deleterious effects of alcohol on family and social life without drawing direct ties to Catholicism. Nonetheless, the temperance debate “caused much irritation and ill-feeling” between Protestants and Catholics, Sydney Ahlstrom concluded, “and gradually created a nearly unified Catholic opposition to political prohibitionists.”<sup>22</sup>

The large influx of Catholic and Jewish immigrants from southern and eastern Europe heightened anti-Catholic and nativist sentiments among American Protestants. Expanding religious pluralism was one of the primary “historical realities” that hindered the Protestant quest for a “Christian America” according to Robert Handy.<sup>23</sup> Thus, as the non-Protestant population grew, responses by Protestant leaders often became more strident. Represented in organizations like the American Protective Association, nativism often warned of Catholic subservience to a “foreign potentate” and “popish plots.”<sup>24</sup>

These related threats of Catholicism, immigration, and urbanization presented a dilemma for solid-South Democratic statesmen such as Truett when Catholic Al Smith won the Democratic nomination for president in 1928. According to James Thompson, “this long-standing antiurbanism, combined with an even older antipathy toward Roman Catholicism, formed the background for the election of 1928.”<sup>25</sup> Beyond Smith’s urban and Catholic background, Baptists were loathe to support a candidate who opposed Prohibition. When a report emerged identifying Truett as a supporter of Smith, Truett, typically uncomfortable discussing political candidates, felt compelled to make the following public statement: “While I uniformly voted with one party, I could not, in the present condition of our country, vote for the candidates of any party, of whatever name, who avowed enemies of our prohibition laws, and who stand for the nullification of the Eighteenth Amendment to our national constitution.”<sup>26</sup> While not identifying Smith by name or engaging in some of the more xenophobic rhetoric of other Protestant leaders, it is clear that Truett shared the unease of other Protestants at the prospect of an anti-Prohibitionist and Roman Catholic entering the White House.

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<sup>22</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 831.

<sup>23</sup>See Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup>Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 854.

<sup>25</sup>Thompson, *Tried as by Fire*, 168.

<sup>26</sup>“Southern Baptist President Denies Being For Al Smith,” untitled newspaper clipping, George W. Truett Collection, file 166.

Baptists and other Protestants feared papal influence in American politics with the rise of Catholic political power. According to James Thompson: "Smith's supposed subjection to papal directives caused Baptists to shudder. It took little prompting to believe that the election of a Catholic president would be the first step toward the persecution of the Baptist people and the silencing of their witness for God."<sup>27</sup> Such concerns were expressed on several occasions in the *Texas Baptist Standard*. Smith was accused of being a "tool of the Romanist conspiracy" who would "use political office to further his church's interest." According to Richard Hughes, Texas Baptists feared that "a Catholic official like Smith was not only going to violate the Eighteenth Amendment but the First, which forbids favoritism toward one church."<sup>28</sup> Baptists argued that Catholic teaching and practice made it mandatory for a Catholic official to prefer the Catholic Church. Thus, for Texas Baptists, there was an irreconcilable conflict between Catholic practice and the First Amendment.<sup>29</sup>

In his public pronouncements, Truett avoided some of the acidic barbs leveled by more extreme nativists of his time. J.W. Hunt, president of McMurry College in Abilene, Texas, warned of a "Catholic shrine in the White House" if Smith were elected. According to Hunt it was the "chicken stealing, crap-shooting, bootlegging negro crowd" that supported the "dirty, drunken, bum," Al Smith.<sup>30</sup> Fort Worth pastor, J. Frank Norris, engaged in even more vitriolic nativist rhetoric. He once warned that if Catholics gained political control in the United States, they would "behead every Protestant preacher and disembowel every Protestant mother. They would burn to ashes every Protestant Church and dynamite every Protestant school. They would destroy the public schools and annihilate every one of our institutions."<sup>31</sup>

### Anti-Catholicism and Religious Liberty

Despite the many criticisms of Catholicism, Baptists' commitment to the separation of church and state cannot be understood as primarily a manifestation of anti-Catholicism. Truett, Mullins, and other Baptists statesmen did not engage in as acerbic anti-Catholic rhetoric as some of their more nativist counterparts and they unfailingly argued that the Baptist commitment

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<sup>27</sup>Thompson, *Tried As By Fire*, 191.

<sup>28</sup>Hughes, 44-45.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 105.

<sup>31</sup>J. Frank Norris, "Roman Catholicism versus Protestantism," *Searchlight* (14 July 1922): 1; quoted in Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 51-52.

to the separation of church and state protected the rights of all believers, including Catholics. When criticizing the opening of diplomatic relations to the Vatican, Truett added: "We call God to witness that we do not wish to be petty and inconsistent and unchristian in our frank reference to this matter. But we do wish to be consistent and faithful to priceless principles, profoundly believing that these principles are of indispensable value, alike to Baptists, to Protestants of every name, to Catholics, to Jews, to Quakers, to everybody in our land."<sup>32</sup> In his famous address on religious liberty, Truett affirmed the freedom of all people as a hallmark of religious liberty: "A Baptist would rise at midnight to plead for absolute religious liberty for his Catholic neighbor, and for his Jewish neighbor, and for everybody else."<sup>33</sup> Such assurances may not have provided consolation to Catholics hearing Truett's addresses, but it does suggest a commitment to religious liberty that existed in Baptist thought long before the rise of Know-Nothingism and the American Protective Association.

Philip Hamburger has argued that the commitment to a "separation of church and state" was the product of late nineteenth-century nativism and anti-Catholicism. Prior to this time, Baptists and other dissenters merely objected to laws that provided for established churches, but "separation was not something desired by most dissenters or guaranteed by the First Amendment."<sup>34</sup> According to Hamburger, the threat posed by a growing Catholic population in the late nineteenth century led to a coalition of nativists, theological liberals, and secularists that sought passage of a constitutional amendment that would ban aid to parochial schools. By implication, Baptist opposition to public funding of parochial schools would be a principle rooted not in a long theological tradition, but a relatively recent position formed in the context of anti-Catholicism.<sup>35</sup>

In opposing aid to parochial schools, Baptists such as Truett drew upon a no-aid principle that has a long pedigree in Baptist thought as well as American constitutional practice. Baptists such as John Leland and Isaac Backus shared Thomas Jefferson's and James Madison's view that compulsory tax support for religion violated the individual conscience.<sup>36</sup> In challenging the

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<sup>32</sup>Truett, "The Baptist Message and Mission," 10-11.

<sup>33</sup>Truett, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," 5.

<sup>34</sup>Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, 10.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*; see especially pp. 193-251.

<sup>36</sup>Some scholars have identified distinctions between Leland's Jeffersonian separationism and Backus's view that church and state, while having distinct roles, should enjoy a "sweet harmony" that would foster a "Christian commonwealth." Nevertheless, while Backus may not have shared Leland's opposition to religious laws that encouraged religious devotion, his opposition to religious taxation remained steadfast. See William G. McLoughlin *New England Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971);

Congregational establishment in Massachusetts, Backus denied the authority of a civil Legislature to impose religious taxes.<sup>37</sup> James Madison, when opposing the famous “general assessment” bill in Virginia, declared “Who does not see. . . that the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute three pence only of his property for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment in all cases whatsoever?”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that Baptist views on religious liberty and the separation of church and state in America were shaped by their battles not with Catholicism, but rather with New England Congregationalists and the Anglican Church in Virginia during the colonial and Revolutionary eras. In fighting to disestablish the Anglican Church in Virginia, the Baptist General Committee of Virginia declared: “If truth is great, and will prevail if left to itself . . . we wish it may be so left, which is the only way to convince the gazing world, that Disciples do not follow Christ for Loaves, and that Preachers to not preach for Benefices.”<sup>39</sup>

George W. Truett characterized attempts at the state level to provide aid to parochial schools as one of the “subtle, but real encroachments upon liberty in America.” Truett warned his Baptist brethren, “Bills are proposed, in various states, again and again, for taxes to be appropriated for sectarian schools. If haply any of our Baptist people have, in an hour of weakness, been in any way enthralled by this encroachment let them speedily repent of such inconsistent course, and go and sin no more!”<sup>40</sup> Aid to parochial schools, for Truett, violated the principles of voluntary support of religion that was concomitant with religious liberty and separation of church and state enshrined in the First Amendment.

William Hutchison has also argued that it is more likely that separation “provided the rationale or excuse for anti-Catholicism” rather than nativism strengthening “popular convictions about separation.”<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Steven Green has contended that the “high water mark” of the separation

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Stanley J. Grenz, “Isaac Backus: Eighteenth Century Light on the School Prayer Issue,” in *Perspectives in Churchmanship: Essays in Honor of Robert E. Torbet*, ed. by David M. Scholer (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), 35-46; and Albert W. Wardin, Jr., “Contrasting Views of Church and State: A Study of John Leland and Isaac Backus,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Winter 1998), 12-30.

<sup>37</sup>See Isaac Backus, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty,” in *Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents*, ed. by Joseph Early, Jr. (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 47-54.

<sup>38</sup>James Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance,” in *Church and State in American History*, 54.

<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Edwin S. Gaustad, “Baptists and the Making of a New Nation,” in *Baptists and the American Experience*, ed. by James E. Wood, Jr. (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1976), 46.

<sup>40</sup>Truett, “The Baptist Message and Mission,” 10.

<sup>41</sup>William R. Hutchison, “Book Review: Philip Hamburger, Separation of Church and State,” *Law and History Review* 23 (Spring 2005): 201.

of church and state in the late nineteenth century has a more complex history than mere anti-Catholicism. While anti-Catholicism surely motivated much of the support for prohibiting aid to parochial schools, Green argues that the no-aid tradition predated the cultural changes brought on by Catholic immigration, organized nativism, and the growth of parochial schools. Green, in the end, concludes that “the fact that nativist groups hijacked that no-funding principle for their bigoted aims does not invalidate the concept or mean that all advocates of the no-funding principle supported nativist goals.”<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

While there is much to celebrate about George W. Truett and other Baptist leaders’ eloquent exposition of the Baptist commitment to religious liberty, history is not well served if we ignore or gloss over their anti-Catholic rhetoric. At the same time, history is not well served if we were to distill their understanding of religious liberty into nothing more than anti-Catholicism. In the end, Truett and others articulated a longstanding theological tradition with an approach that can only be understood in light of their historical context.

George W. Truett’s arguments remain powerful and relevant in light of the threats to religious liberty and the separation of church and state today. One can rightly criticize Truett, Mullins, and other Baptists for an altogether uncritical embrace of American democracy. Their utilization of the Catholic Church to draw a clear contrast with Baptist thought was at times uncharitable; yet, their defense of religious liberty and the separation of church and state remains central to the self-understanding of Baptists. As Edwin Gaustad has suggested, George W. Truett’s emphasis on “the right to private judgment” in spiritual matters, “sounds to me like the clearest of trumpet tunes, and I even question whether one needs any foil or foe to make those notes any more powerful or penetrating.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Steven K. Green, “Blaming Blaine’: Understanding the Blaine Amendment and the ‘No-Funding’ Principle,” *First Amendment Law Review* 2 (Winter 2003): 113.

<sup>43</sup>Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Baptist Tradition of Religious Liberty in America* (Waco, Tex.: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 1995), 23.



# POLITICAL SERMONS OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDING ERA, 1730-1805



Ellis Sandoz

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Over a number of years, as I did research on the American founders' political philosophy, I discovered that the "pulpit of the American Revolution" – to borrow the title of John Wingate Thornton's 1860 collection – was the source of exciting and uncommonly important material. What had passed for pamphlets in my reading of excerpted eighteenth-century American material often turned out to be published sermons. I began to realize that this material, showing the perspective of biblical faith concerning fundamental questions of human existence during our nation's formative period, was extraordinarily abundant and extraordinarily little known.<sup>1</sup>

To permit the religious perspective concerning the rise of American nationhood to have the representative expression is important because a steady attention to the pulpit from 1730 to 1805 unveils a distinctive rhetoric of political discourse: Preachers interpreted pragmatic events in terms of a political theology imbued with philosophical and revelatory learning. Their sermons also demonstrate the existence and effectiveness of a popular political culture that constantly assimilated the currently urgent political and constitutional issues to the profound insights of the Western spiritual and philosophical traditions. That culture's political theorizing within the compass of ultimate historical and metaphysical concerns gave clear contours to secular events in the minds of Americans of the vital era.

Religion gave birth to America, Tocqueville observed long ago.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of revolution, in his last-ditch attempt to stave off impending catastrophe, Edmund Burke reminded the House

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<sup>1</sup>This article was previously published as the foreword (© 1991 by Ellis Sandoz) in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, vol. 1, (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998), and is republished with permission from the author. The foreword has been edited for content.

<sup>2</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence. ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City: NY, 1960), II, 432; cf. 46-47, 288-91.

of Commons of the inseparable alliance between liberty and religion among Englishmen in America.<sup>3</sup> Mercy Otis Warren noted in her 1805 history of the American Revolution: "It must be acknowledged, that the religious and moral character of Americans yet stands on a higher grade of excellence and purity, than that of most other nations."<sup>4</sup> Of the Americans on the eve of the Revolution Carl Bridenbaugh has exclaimed, "who can deny that for them the very core of existence was their relation to God?"<sup>5</sup>

Although they present a range of viewpoints on many different problems over a period of seventy-five years, all these writers agree that political liberty and religious truth are vitally intertwined. And while the role of the clergy as the philosophers of the American founding has not received great attention from students of political theory, it was abundantly clear to contemporaries. Perhaps the best insight into the role of the ministry was expressed by a participant, Reverend William Gordon of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who wrote the celebrated *History of the American Revolution*. "The ministers of New England being mostly Congregationalists," Gordon wrote,

are from that circumstance, in a professional way more attached and habituated to the principles of liberty than if they had spiritual supervisors to lord it over them, and were in hopes of possessing in their turn, through the gift of government, the seat of power. They oppose arbitrary rule in civil concerns from the love of freedom, as well as from a desire of guarding against its introduction into religious matters. . . . The clergy of the colony are as virtuous, sensible and learned a set of men, as will probably be found in any part of the globe of equal size and equally populous. . . . It is certainly a duty of the clergy to accommodate their discourses to the times; to preach against such sins as are most prevalent, and to recommend such virtues as are most wanted. . . . You have frequently remarked that though the partisans of arbitrary power will freely censure that preacher, who speaks boldly for the liberties of the people, they will admire as an excellent divine, the person whose discourse is wholly in the opposite, and teaches, that magistrates have a divine right for doing wrong, and are to be implicitly obeyed; men professing Christianity, as if the religion of the blessed Jesus bound them

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<sup>3</sup>Edmund Burke, "Speech on Moving His Resolutions of Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22, 1775" in Burke, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Peter J. Stanlis (1963; rpr. Chicago: n.d.), 147-85, esp. 158-60.

<sup>4</sup>Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, 2 vols., ed. Lester H. Cohen (Indianapolis, IN: 1988), II, 686.

<sup>5</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, *Spirit of '76: The Growth of American Patriotism Before Independence, 1607-1776* (New York: 1975), 117. The argument underlying this paragraph is stated more fully in Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge, LA: 1990), esp. chaps. 3 to 6; see also the Bibliographic Note herein.

tamely to part with their natural and social rights, and slavishly to bow their neck to any tyrant.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the difference among them, these sermon authors take as their reality the still familiar biblical image of Creator and creation, of fallen and sinful men, striving in a mysteriously ordered existence toward a personal salvation and an eschatological fulfillment. They knew that these goals are themselves paradoxically attainable only through the divine grace of election, a conditional experienced as the unmerited gift of God, discernible (if at all) in a person's faith in Christ, which yields assurance of Beatitude. The relationships are variously symbolized by personal and corporate reciprocal covenants ordering individual lives, church communities, and all of society in multiple layers productive of good works, inculcating divine truth and attentiveness to providential direction according to the "law of liberty" of the sovereign God revealed in the lowly Nazarene.<sup>7</sup> The picture that thus emerges is not parochially Puritan or Calvinistic but Augustinian and biblical.

The varieties of spiritual belief fundamental to these writers cannot be explored here, but some background can be indicated. For though our concern is with political sermons—and thus exceptional expressions of the faith of a people who looked to the eternal beyond for the perfect fulfillment of their pilgrimage through time in partnership with God—the spiritual root of that collaborative enterprise directed by Providence requires a word or two of clarification. Of course, the political background is the direct movement of disparate British colonial societies toward independent nationhood, federally organized under a Constitution that preserves the essentials of English liberty under law. It was a passage of history that involved the concerted effort of military force evinced in the Revolution and the articulation of the principles of free government; these principles inspired creation of a national community and became the grounds of a political orthodoxy called republican and constitutional government. Momentous developments crescendoed with British adoption of the Stamp Act of 1765, leading in little more than a decade to the decision for independence in 1776, which demanded eight years of fighting and formally ended with the signing of the peace treaty in Paris in 1783. The Federal Convention in 1787 provided a barely accepted Constitution, one immediately embellished by a Bill of

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<sup>6</sup>William Gordon, *The History of the Rise Progress and Establishment of the United States of America, including An Account of the Late War*, 3 vols., 2d ed. (New York 1794), I, 273-74. See the study of Gordon's History in Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1980). Apparently overlooked by Cohen is the rare and important volume by [Bernard] Hubley, *History of the American Revolution* (Northumberland, PA, 1805). Projected as a two-volume work, only the first volume, of 606 pages, appeared, covering the years 1773 to 1775 (Evans 137105; Huntington 7593).

<sup>7</sup>The "law of liberty" or "perfect law of freedom (*nomon teleion electherias*)" of James 1:25 (cf. James 2:12 and I Peter 2:16) echoes the Johannine Christ: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make [set] you free (*electherosei*)" as given in John 8:32 and reiterated in subsequent verses (8:33, 36), culminating in the great declaration: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Rights, that became the supreme law of the land in 1791. By the beginning of Jefferson's second term, the institutional arrangements had been tested and operations refined, the first party system had emerged, and the country had doubled in size thanks to the Louisiana Purchase. But another strand of history accompanies, interacts with, and gives roots to this familiar progress, one that is less known and lacks the direct line of development just rehearsed.

The revolution in the spiritual life of America began within a decade of the preaching of the first sermon by the celebrated Benjamin Colman in Boston in 1730. It is called the Great Awakening. There is reason to suppose that the two lines of development are intimately, even decisively, connected. Narrowly construed as occurring in the years 1739 to 1742, the Great Awakening designates the outburst of religious revival that swept the colonies in those years.<sup>8</sup> It reached from Georgia to New England and affected every stratum of society. Since the earthquake of 1727 that Benjamin Coleman alludes to in his sermon, however, there had been a quickening of religious impulses. The Awakening was a spiritual earthquake, one that, as Alan Heimert and Perry Miller write, "clearly began a new era, not merely of American Protestantism, but in the evolution of the American mind."<sup>9</sup> A turning point and crisis in American society, it rumbled and echoed through the next decades.

American events could be seen as part of the general rise of religious sentiment traceable in Europe between 1730 and 1760, particularly in England, where the catalysts were the itinerant Anglican priests John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, and their compatriot George Whitefield. These men played a large part in rescuing England from the social debauchery and political corruption associated with the Gin Age, aspects of the period portrayed in Hogarth's prints and Fielding's novels.<sup>10</sup> The so-called Second Awakening began in 1800-1801 with revival camp meetings on the frontier and in the backcountry. The great political events of the American founding, thus, have a backdrop of resurgent religion whose calls for repentance and faith plainly complement the calls to resist tyranny and constitutional corruption so as to live as God-fearing Christians, and, eventually, as responsible republican citizens.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis, IN, 1967), xiii.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, xiv; cf. Perry Miller, "The Great Awakening from 1740-1750," *Encounter* (Durham, NC, Duke University Divinity School, 1956), 5-9; also Herbert L. Osgood, *American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century*, 4 vols. (1924; rpr. Gloucester, MA, 1958), III, 407-490; and Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in American, 1743-1776* (New York, 1955), 64, 150-56, 404.

<sup>10</sup>On the Gin Age see W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 7 vols. (London, 1892), II, chap. 5; also M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925; rpr. New York, 1964), 27-37 and *passim*; more entertainingly, see the first modern novels, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and, especially, *Amelia* (1751).

<sup>11</sup>A fine, concise account of the relationship of the Great Awakening to political developments is given

The preeminent awakener in America throughout much of this whole period was the English evangelist George Whitefield, who first visited the colonies in 1738 and made six more preaching tours of the country, and who died in 1770 one September morning just before he was to preach in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Regarded as not only the most controversial preacher of his time but as “perhaps the greatest extemporaneous orator in the history of the English church,” it is Whitefield’s view of the human plight and its remedy that will best show the thrust of the Awakening as formative of the American mind. James Downey has written:

The theme of his preaching is that of evangelicals in every age: in his natural state man is estranged from God; Jesus Christ, by his death and Atonement, has paid the price of that estrangement and made reconciliation with God possible; to achieve salvation man, with the guidance and the grace of the Holy Ghost, must repudiate sin and openly identify himself with Christ. To Whitefield religion, when properly understood, meant “a thorough, real, inward change of nature, wrought in us by the powerful operations of the Holy Ghost, conveyed to and nourished in our hearts, by a constant use of all the means of grace, evidenced by a good life, and bringing forth the fruits of the spirit.” There was, of course, nothing new in this belief. Its special appeal for eighteenth-century audiences lay partly in the fact that it answered an emotional need the charismatic personality of the man who revived it.<sup>12</sup>

It is perhaps worth stressing in a secularized age that the mystic’s ascent and the evangelist’s call, although conducted in different forums, have much in common. For each seeks to find the responsive place in a person’s consciousness where a vivid communion with God occurs, with the consequence that this concourse becomes the transformative core for that person, who therewith sees himself as a “new man”: initially in the conversion experience (represented as a spiritual rebirth) and subsequently in the continuing meditative nurture of the soul, pursued by every means but chiefly, in American Protestantism, through prayer, sermons, and scriptural meditation. The great cry of the awakeners was for a converted ministry, one able to revive religious communities lacking vitality and zeal, so as to make the presence of God with his people a palpable reality. Such hortatory preaching and intent were the hallmarks of the so-called New Light, or New Side, clergy, as contrasted with their opposites (Old Light, Old Side ministers), who eschewed emotion and experimental religion. Many of the former, like

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by William G. McLoughlin in “‘Enthusiasm for Liberty’: The Great Awakening as the Key to the Revolution,” in Jack P. Greene and William G. McLoughlin, *Preachers & Politicians: Two Essays on the Origins of the American Revolution* (Worcester, MA, 1977), 47-73; cf. Donald Weber, *Rhetoric and History in Revolutionary New England* (New York, 1988).

<sup>12</sup>James Downey, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford, 1969), 155, 157, internal quote cited from J. Gillies, ed., *Works on Whitefield*, 6 vols. (London, 1771-1772), V, 161.

Whitefield himself, had no church of their own but traveled the country preaching in homes and pastures or wherever they could four and five times in a day that often began before dawn. They were not always treated as welcome visitors by the established clergy, with whom serious conflict sometimes arose.

It is against the experiential background of such preaching that the political teaching of the minister of the eighteenth century is to be seen as it was powerfully displayed in crisis and revolution. From their biblical perspective, it can be said that man is a moral agent living freely in a reality that is good, coming from the hand of God: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."<sup>13</sup> With the responsibility to live well, in accordance with God's commandments and through exercise of his mind and free will, man longs for knowledge of God's word and truth and seeks God's help to keep an open heart so as to receive them. Among the chief hindrances to this life of true liberty is the oppression of men, who in service to evil deceive with untruth and impose falsehood in its place, proclaiming it to be true. Man, blessed with liberty, reason, and a moral sense, created in the image of God, a little lower than the angels, and given dominion over the earth (Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:6-12), is the chief and most perfect of God's works.

Liberty is, thus, an essential principle of man's constitution, a natural trait which yet reflects the supernatural Creator. Liberty is God-given. The growth of virtue and perfection of being depends upon free choice, in response to divine invitation and help, in a cooperative relationship. The correlate of responsibility, liberty is most truly exercised by living in accordance with truth. Man's dominion over the earth and the other creatures, his mastery of nature through reason, is subject to no restraint but the law of his nature, which is perfect liberty; the obligation to obey the laws of the Creator only checks his licentiousness and abuse.

These preachers, however, understood that this gift of freedom to do right and live truly carries another possibility, rebellion and rejection, as well. This, in turn, leads to the necessity of government to coerce a degree of right living and justice from a mankind fallen from the high road of willing obedience to the loving Father. Unfortunately, coercive law can be inflicted in ways that are not merely just and conducive to truth, righteousness, and union with God, but not infrequently to their very opposites. This biblical understanding of the human condition is reflected in the most famous passage of *The Federalist*, No. 51 which turns on the sentiments that if men were angels there would be no need for government, for what is government but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? It remains true, James Madison continued,

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<sup>13</sup>Genesis 1:31. This, and Psalm 119:134 ("Deliver me from the oppression of man: So will I keep thy precepts."), were the texts for the Plymouth Anniversary Sermon by Gad Hitchcock of Pembroke, which was preached at Plymouth, Massachusetts, on December 22, 1774; it is the principle source of the summary given in this and the following paragraph; reprinted in Verna M. Hall ed., *The Christian History of the American Revolution* (San Francisco, 1976), 30-43.

that “Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been, and ever will be pursued, until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit.”

A few words may now be said about the sermon as a rhetorical and symbolic form, particularly the political sermon. It was the axiom of one of the leading figures of the New Light movement and the educator of preachers, Nathanael Emmons, “Have something to say; say it.” The suggestion of terseness is misleading, however, since eighteenth-century preachers had a great deal to say. The Sunday service might typically open with a prayer that lasted an hour as measured by a glass on the pulpit; it would then be turned twice during the course of the sermon. A short break for lunch would be taken, and then the preaching would continue in the afternoon. The form of Puritan sermons followed a model taught by William Perkins’s *Arte of Prophesying* (1592, translated in 1607). The principle basic to his approach was, following Augustine and Calvin, that the Bible is reflexive in the sense of providing its own explanation of its meaning in a consistent whole. This literal meaning is to be found through use of the three methods of circumstance, collation, and application. Thus, it is the task of the preacher as interpreter to place any scriptural text into its circumstances and context, collating that text with similar texts elsewhere in the scriptures, to find consistent meaning, and then to finish by conforming his preaching to the “analogue of faith.” This means that any statement made had to be in harmony with or contained in the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>14</sup>

The key to finding the unity of the Bible, according to William Perkins, was to begin by first mastering Paul’s Letter to the Romans; then, and only then, ought the student move to the remainder of the New Testament and subsequently to the Old Testament. The result of this, because of the emphases in Romans, will be a stress on justification, sanctification, and true faith.

The steps in writing and delivering the sermon begin with the reading of the divine text, considered as the holy Word of God and superior to or outside of the remainder of the presentation. The text is to be read aloud to the congregation by way of “opening” the Word, for (in the Calvinist conception, at least) it is the Word and the Word alone that is the proper province of preaching. The duty of the preacher, then is merely to “open” the one clear and natural sense of scripture, so that the Holy Spirit can move through the preacher’s words into the hearers’ souls to effect spiritual transformation. Thus, in Perkins’s formal outline, the preacher ought:

1. To read the Text distinctly out of the canonicall Scripture.
2. To give the sense and understanding of it being read by the Scripture itself.
3. To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the naturall sense.
4. To applie (if he have the gift) the doctrines rightly collected to the manners of men in a simple and plain speech.

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<sup>14</sup>My discussion at this point relies on Teresa Toulouse, *The Art of Prophesying: New England Sermons and the Shaping of Belief* (Macon, Ga., 1987), chap. 1.

This form is understood to embody the circumstances, collations, and analogies of faith previously mentioned.<sup>15</sup> The format of Text, Doctrine, and Application remained typical of sermons reproduced here, and in the hands of the most accomplished preachers (such as Jonathan Edwards the Elder) the old form could be effective for “sustaining rigorous analysis and dramatizing the essential relationships among the Word, human intelligence, and conduct.”<sup>16</sup> It is not surprise that a mastery of classical rhetoric is displayed in the sermons of the eighteenth century, since this was the “golden age of the classics” in America.<sup>17</sup>

Of the several vehicles for expounding political theology available to American ministers, the most venerable were the election sermons preached for 256 years in Massachusetts and 156 years in Connecticut. The practice began in Vermont in 1778 and in New Hampshire in 1784 in the sermon by Samuel McClintock. These were sermons preached annually to the governor and legislature after the election of officers. To be chosen for the task was an honor, and the sermons were published and distributed to each official with an extra copy or two for the ministers of the officials’ home district. It is at least arguable that a published sermon is a mark of its excellence to begin with, whatever the occasion of its utterance. One index of quality is suggested by the fact that very few of the sermons preached ever were published; thus Samuel Dunbar, an Old Light minister from Stoughton, Massachusetts, wrote out some eight thousand sermons during his long career but published only nine of them.

Besides the election sermon, the artillery sermon was also an annual affair in Massachusetts and dealt with civic and military matters. The Thursday or Fifth-day Lecture was begun by the Reverend John Cotton in Boston in 1633 and was practiced for 200 years; it was a popular event and was combined with Market Day for gathering and discussing matters of social and political interest. Election sermons were sometimes then repeated for a different audience. The Lecture was no Boston or Congregationalist monopoly, as can be seen from Abraham Keteltas’s sermon preached during the evening Lecture in the First Presbyterian Church at Newburyport in 1777. Convention sermons also were political in nature and grew out of election-day ceremonies.

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<sup>15</sup>Toulouse, *The Art of Prophesying*, 15-21, quoting William Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying* (1592, translated in 1607).

<sup>16</sup>Wilson H. Kimnach, “Jonathan Edwards’s Pursuit of Reality,” in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York, 1988), 115.

<sup>17</sup>An idea of this can be gained from Josephine K. Piercy, *Studies in Literary Types in Seventeenth Century America (1607-1710)*, 2d ed. (Hamden, CT, 1969), 155-67; a more elaborate treatment is George W. Hervey, *A System of Christian Rhetoric, For the use of Preachers and Other Speakers* (New York, 1873); an “index” (or glossary) of rhetorical figures from *accismus* and *addubitatio* to *votum* and *zeugma*, is given on pp. 577-628; on the classics in America, see Richard M. Gummere, *American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963) and the books of Meyer Reinhold, who characterizes the Revolutionary period as the Golden Age of the classics, in *Classical Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage of the United States*, (Detroit, MI, 1984), 95.



There were many other opportunities for political discourse, such as the annual observation of January 30 as the execution day of the king-turned-tyrant, Charles I. Century sermons were preached to mark the Glorious Revolution's centenary, on November 5, 1788, the anniversary of William III's landing in England to secure it from popery and tyranny and to preserve traditional British liberties. Days of prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving were proclaimed for particular occasions throughout the eighteenth century and even earlier. Such times were nationally proclaimed ("recommended") at least sixteen times by the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War; and the entire American community repaired to their various churches on such days of fasting, prayer, and humiliation to repent of sins, seek forgiveness, and implore "God to lift the affliction of their suffering from them—the jeremiad form so central to American consciousness."<sup>18</sup> Days of thanksgiving were likewise proclaimed when divine favor was experienced. The end of the war brought a great outpouring of praise and gratitude. Such proclamations became rarer under the Constitution but did not disappear during Washington's or Adams's administrations, and their suspension during Jefferson's administration was followed by a reinstatement under James Madison. The Fourth of July regularly occasioned political sermons as well as orations. The death of Washington evoked a universal grief and countless sermons extolling the character of the American Joseph; an example is that of Henry Holcombe, a Baptist, who preached in Savannah, Georgia. The Boston Massacre sermons and orations commemorated the events of March 5, 1770, and the "Patriots' Day" observances, as they are now called, marked the battles of Lexington and Concord in New England each year on April 19. Not only was such preaching widely attended, repeated, and published as tracts, but it was often reprinted in the newspapers as well.

This rhetorical form expressed the philosophical mean that free government is based on liberty, and liberty is founded in truth and justice as framed by eternal laws. Republicanism and virtue were far from split apart by James Madison and his colleagues at the Federal Convention, as the clergy understood our constitutional system. For these preachers and their flocks, the two remained essentially bound together. The political culture of this country was not only all the things it is most frequently said to be (I think of Bernard Bailyn's five items), but was deeply rooted in the core religious consciousness articulated above all by the preachers; theirs were the pulpits of a new nation with a privileged, providential role in world history.

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<sup>18</sup>For the text of some of these resolutions and analysis see Sandoz, *A Government of Laws*, chap. 5; for the jeremiad see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, (Madison, Wis., 1978), 176-210 and *passim*.

# THE MEANING OF LIFE IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN STEINBECK



By A. Ronald Tonks

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Understanding the meaning of life has long challenged humans. The struggle to understand the inconsistencies of one's environment can test the human spirit. How do we make sense of life?

The struggle to comprehend the meaning of life has also challenged many modern writers. Increased study of the theme in numerous authors does not alleviate or mitigate the problem but often seems to compound it. The issue of the meaning of life seems to gain greater attention in times of insecurity, particularly when the suffering and hardships of man come clearly to the fore. The question persists. How does one determine meaning and still make effective moral choices?

This short study of John Steinbeck's writings offers some insight into his interpretation of the meaning of life. Extreme care must be taken to avoid the impression that Steinbeck's writings are religious or theological in emphasis. Writing at mid-century, John Killinger asserted that few works of true literary merit in recent times have adequately presented the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> In fact using the term "Christian literature" in referring to the writings of Steinbeck is to misunderstand seriously both the Christian faith and the emphases Steinbeck himself makes. It should not, however, minimize the realization that some specific Christian emphases do exist in his writings. In addition, one cannot assign single, dogmatic or even firm convictions to most authors' writings. Steinbeck's life spanned two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Korean War, and the Vietnam Conflict, and those events were indelibly impressed upon his mind. The intent of this paper is to note some progression of thought as well as the change of emphasis throughout Steinbeck's writing career. The thought patterns found in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) are clearly different from those seen in *The Moon is Down* (1942) or *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1962).

John Steinbeck (1902-1968), was born in Salinas, California, to parents of Prussian ancestry with modest means.<sup>2</sup> His father served as treasurer of Monterey County, California, and his

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<sup>1</sup>John Killinger, *The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature* (New York: Abingdon, 1963), 17.

<sup>2</sup>John Steinbeck, "Biography" The Nobel Prize in Literature, 1962 [online biography]; available from [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck.html); accessed on March 12, 2012.

mother was a school teacher. In his early life he seems to have lacked a clear sense of direction and moved frequently from one job to another. Even though he constantly moved from one place to another, he always felt impelled to write. Despite his efforts, his early writings were not readily received by publishers, and only after the acceptance of *Tortilla Flat* did he have any distinction as an author.<sup>3</sup>

## The Caste and Class Emphasis

John Steinbeck is best remembered for his famous depression novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*. The novels appeared in the early age of the bestselling novel. "Having little else to do for inexpensive pleasure people stayed home and read novels that were to give the buyer a lot of pages for his money,"<sup>4</sup> Some have said it appeared that Steinbeck was trying to write what might be called novels of destiny, e.g. *In Dubious Battle*.<sup>5</sup> His writing does not indicate a sense of superiority but rather an attempt to address the immediate needs of the people of his age.<sup>6</sup> In his depression novels, Steinbeck manifests an interest in the changes in status, class and social mobility of society as the result of the depression. In *In Dubious Battle*, the underlying theme is that one must sacrifice all for the greater cause.<sup>7</sup>

For Steinbeck, the depression seems to have emphasized an impermanence of existence with overtones of hopelessness. As the Joads begin to leave Oklahoma they are almost totally overwhelmed. Steinbeck did, however, in this period show an optimistic expectancy that everything would get better and improve. Later in his address on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, he gave a description of the purpose of the awards and affirmed his sense of hope. "They [Nobel Awards] are offered for increased and continuing knowledge of man and his world—for understanding and communication, which are functions of literature. And they are offered for demonstrations of the capacity for peace—the culmination of all the others."<sup>8</sup> The optimistic era of liberal theology had not died and it clearly was continuing to influence much of the American mind.

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<sup>3</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), 443.

<sup>4</sup>Willard Thorp, *American Writing in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 111.

<sup>5</sup>W. M. Frohock, *The Novel of Violence in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Steele Commager, *The American Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 249.

<sup>7</sup>John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (New York: The Viking Press, 1937), 205.

<sup>8</sup>John Steinbeck, "Banquet Speech," The Nobel Prize in Literature, 1962 [online speech]; available from [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech.html); accessed on March 12, 2012.

The foolishness and naivety of the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* is the reason for their movement westward, and yet this same foolishness and naivety is understandable as it describes their search for a sense of security. Having said this, however, *The Grapes of Wrath* is indeed more than the story of the flight of a few Okies to the promised land of California. It is an indictment of the caste and class, not to mention the economy which forced them to move.<sup>9</sup> Here, vividly portrayed, is a prime example of the human predicament, a hungry starving group surrounded by a land of plenty.

The reality of the Depression in the work of Steinbeck may have been conditioned in part as the result of his own poverty and suffering. Steinbeck hates those exploiters who have made a wasteland of America and have deprived its people of their heritage. To Steinbeck, a product of the arid southwest, the villains were impersonal but nonetheless vital forces such as the farmers associations and the canneries. "The unholy alliance that binds them together keeps wages down and forces prices up. The end might be serfdom."<sup>10</sup> Even in the face of this apparent destruction of the little man by the bigger one, Steinbeck shows the Joads pushing forward to what he and they believe will be eventual triumph. "The migrant looked humbly for pleasure on the roads."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the idea is similar to the man bloodied in battle who rests a while only to rise and fight again.

While life is often portrayed as bordering on the futile, it is not always pointless. Jim Nolan in *In Dubious Battle* clearly portrays that fact as he willingly sacrificed everything, including his life, to see the equalization of all.<sup>12</sup> Based on this book Steinbeck was often accused, especially in his early career, of leftist leanings. In fairness to Steinbeck, it should be noted that he did not regard this book as a tract but simply a novel.<sup>13</sup> The harshness of activities and language in this work was a serious attempt to explain the oppressed to the oppressor. In the common language of our day it would be called the relationship of the 'have-nots' with the 'haves' and vice versa. Steinbeck often associated the attainment of success with harshness, while, at the same time, he preferred a simple explanation. One reviewer has forcefully stated that Steinbeck had a tendency to drop human beings to the animal level.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking, 1939), 63.

<sup>10</sup>Thorp, 13.

<sup>11</sup>Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*, 13.

<sup>12</sup>Steinbeck, *Dubious Battle*, 223.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis Garrett, ed., *The Portable Steinbeck* (New York: Viking, 1946), xvii-xviii.

<sup>14</sup>Wagenknecht, 446.

While Steinbeck is concerned with the world, he experiences significant tension. He recognizes the scientific method but records what he sees realistically. He does not, however, divorce himself from a concept of optimistic hopefulness. The resolution of the human predicament in his writings may appear difficult to assess. The novels contain strong overtones that man will work out his own salvation toward a human Utopia. Steinbeck does not seem to be willing to endorse such a viewpoint, being convinced that man, molded and forged by intangible agents, cannot develop his entire destiny. The Joads are impoverished in their native Oklahoma, not only through the power of the landowners but also the deadening pressure of physical drought. The only avenue of escape is to flee to a new land. However, such a course of action presents frustrations when, once again, external problems arise. For Steinbeck it seems there was nothing left to do but hope that the night would end and the day dawn. He knew this feeling, yet he never completely abandoned his optimistic bent.

In his early writings of the Depression, Steinbeck may have leaned towards what some might express as a communistic ideology as a solution of life.<sup>15</sup> The evil of the world, in Steinbeck's eyes, can be overcome only if everyone were reduced to the same level. There is almost a look for an escape to the American ideal where honesty, thrift and a willingness to work were the only things that really counted. Remove the ruling barons, and life and living will be restored to all classes. Again the temper of the times cannot be divorced from Steinbeck's philosophy. The New Deal of the 1930s, which radically readjusted the American way of life, was planted, grew, and blossomed as Steinbeck's Depression novels were being nurtured.

### Steinbeck's Sentimentality in the Meaning of Human Life

While Steinbeck does, on several occasions, discuss a revolutionary situation (see *In Dubious Battle*) largely within the climate of the age, he does not glory in such an event. Rather, he seems to peer at the world through rose-colored glasses. His characters are only forced to violence by clearly revealed circumstances. *In Dubious Battle* records several violent scenes, but they are used to supplement the study of the pathology of Communism rather than to defend it. In *The Grapes of Wrath* an abundance of food is destroyed, and the common people, though starving are denied it. Still it would only be fair to say that Steinbeck did not think the destruction was deliberately leading to the ills of man. Almost unconsciously, Steinbeck seemed to believe that the one charged with this evil task was only an unwilling pawn for the intangible forces. He has a strong sympathy for the poor and a vital conviction of the purity of heart.

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<sup>15</sup>Such an assertion would have been hotly contested by Steinbeck himself. He surely would have claimed his support for President Lyndon Johnson and the American involvement in the Vietnam War as evidence of his rejection of "communist sympathies." There is no record of Steinbeck's official relationship with any organization which promoted these ideas. Still there often appear undertones that if followed to a complete conclusion, would endorse the classless society.

Perhaps one of the most vivid presentations of philosophical sentimentality is found in *Burning Bright* (1950), the play-novel. In this work Steinbeck presents three different situations with the same characters portraying the universality of human problems in all phases of life. The author seems to say that evil is inevitable; therefore, evil done for the proper reason is acceptable and leads to the improvement of the whole of mankind. The killing of Victor by Friend Ed is justified on the basis that the world will be a better place without him.<sup>16</sup>

The development of Steinbeck's thinking becomes increasingly clear as some of his later works are examined. The overly optimistic hopefulness for mankind with a naïve sentimentality gives way following the World War II to an amorality bordering on despair. This is redeemed through his almost return to the Calvinistic concept of the depravity of man. In *East of Eden* (1952), the character of Cathy Ames is not colored with any sentiment, for she is evil and will remain so. She is pictured as having been born with a deformity, just as real as any physical deformity. One reviewer has called this "the monster concept." Cathy can never receive redemption.<sup>17</sup>

Steinbeck certainly does not wrestle with the problems of man. To him it is either a case of man being all good or all bad. Unfortunately, this is not real life. Man cannot be so easily categorized, for man is both good and evil, sometimes both at the same time. Humans are quick to see bad in the good rather than good in the bad but every man is given a direct choice.<sup>18</sup>

It must be stated emphatically that there is more than one Steinbeck. In *The Grapes of Wrath* and in *In Dubious Battle*, he is almost angry at men and the world, not to mention the circumstances which surround the concrete events. He particularly attacks the forces that demand or develop a determinism in his characters. Still, his evil characters have a rather loveable sweetness about them. They may be bungling and even wicked but always the well-meaning products of their environment. The German officers in *The Moon is Down* have this underlying sense of goodness, which clearly illustrates the sentimentality of Steinbeck in dealing with people.<sup>19</sup> The heart is warmed in *The Grapes of Wrath* when Joad is given food for half price by Mae, with the truck driver assuming the bill.<sup>20</sup> To Steinbeck this theory of what human nature ought to be has caused him to forget what he has seen men actually do.<sup>21</sup> Man, it is true, continues as a pilgrim along the

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<sup>16</sup>John Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* (New York: Viking, 1950), 138.

<sup>17</sup>Edmund Fuller, *Man in Modern Fiction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 28.

<sup>18</sup>John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (New York: Viking, 1961), 80-81.

<sup>19</sup>John Steinbeck, *The Moon is Down* (New York: Viking, 1942), 42-48.

<sup>20</sup>Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*, 218.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 486-87.

way of life seeking an answer to some purpose. One can argue that the responsibility of literature should be to depict the struggle of man to know himself—something that man must do as Steinbeck himself asserted in his Banquet Speech on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature.<sup>22</sup> The sentimentality of Steinbeck in dealing with the problem of man leads to a rather serious shortcoming. This is particularly true in *The Grapes of Wrath*, when in reality the predicament of the Okies was in part the result of their own weakness, stupidity, and greed.<sup>23</sup>

Steinbeck has deep feeling for those who are so uncomplicated that they cannot deal with life and do not understand or comprehend their suffering. The Joads are driven along for no apparent reason. They find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, for it is clearly shown that, whatever they do, they will never be able to escape. Tragedy is on every hand, but still they cannot cease from their journey to what they hope will be happiness. While Steinbeck may not love his characters, he cannot be a party to their being abused. He is opposed to human beings receiving such treatment.

### The Influence of Affluence in the Post World War Two Novels

The period of the Second World War (1941-1945) in some ways was a time of suspension for the novelists of America. While it is true many of the abuses that aroused their ire in the 1930s had not been removed, the united struggle for peace and freedom now occupied their minds. The 'have-nots' of the 1930s were either in the armed forces or prospering in war plants, thus reducing the need for deep concern toward the poverty-stricken. Although his novel *The Winter of Our Discontent* won for Steinbeck the Nobel Prize for Literature, many have felt that his best writing was done during the Depression period.<sup>24</sup> While this assertion may be true, Steinbeck wrote within the context of his times. The masterful skills of Steinbeck in examining the tension of the affluent society are certainly evident in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. This suggestion seems to come in part from the removal of the wrath of indignation of the crusading Depression novels.

In *East of Eden* Steinbeck is interested in people and the events that surround them, but any driving spirit for the betterment of mankind is almost entirely missing. The futility of life is still found in Steinbeck's post-war novels, but wearing a different cloak. No longer is the scene one of depression and almost hopeless poverty, but of respectability with affluence. Steinbeck's skill as a writer is perhaps best portrayed in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, where he has Ethan Allan Hawley wrestle with the tension of remaining poor or living with a pricking conscience.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup>Steinbeck, "Banquet Speech," Nobelprize.org.

<sup>23</sup>Steinbeck. *Grapes of Wrath*, 57.

<sup>24</sup>Arthur Mizener, "Does a Moral Vision of the Thirties Deserve a Nobel Prize?" *The New York Times Book Review*, (December 9, 1962), 4, 43-45.

question comes through time and again. Is Ethan Allen sacrificing his personal integrity for material gain? In this novel Steinbeck enters into the intricate struggle of most Americans today. The answer can never be merely a negative or a positive response. The answer will cost something and may well enter the gray area of impossible resolution. Steinbeck shows that Ethan Allan decides, on the sub-conscious level, to provide for the improvement of his family even though he could not look upon himself.<sup>26</sup> The theme is so carefully woven by the author that the reader can easily identify with the essence of the struggle. Ethan Allan follows the morass of society, but subtly he is destroying himself. This is the human struggle and is not unlike that of the Apostle Paul, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."<sup>27</sup>

It can be suggested that Ethan Allan could not do otherwise, as he was pressured by his wife to improve his station, especially since he came from an upright and formerly prosperous family. He rationalizes that his actions are little different from those who legally rob their family through poor investments. Finally, when his son accepted the same moral standard he held—that a person is guilty only when discovered—Ethan Allan determines that suicide is the only solution. Even as he attempts it, he finds in his pocket the Talisman, a family heirloom particularly cherished by his daughter. While he has destroyed himself and, in part, his family, both mentally and spiritually, he cannot destroy himself physically for it will put a light out in the life of his daughter.<sup>28</sup>

The post-war era of affluence is portrayed with keen insight by Steinbeck. Even with prosperity achieved, the futility of life continues. No longer is it a poor struggling Joad seeking a better life in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but Ethan Allan Hawley, the respected and now prosperous gentleman of New Baytown who, with every comfort of life, is distressed and without hope.

A modified moralism of Steinbeck is found in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, for while life is futile there is a slight ray of hope. Honest Ethan Allan did not get anywhere. It was only as he became slightly dishonest that he prospered. All the time, however, he preserved his sense of decency and in part this seems to be behind his retreat from the brink of suicide.

No study of Steinbeck's post-war writings would be complete without mention of *Travels with Charley*. While this work is not intended to be profound it is delightfully told and does produce

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<sup>25</sup>Steinbeck, *Winter of Our Discontent*, 39 and 173.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>27</sup>Romans 7: 15, 19 RSV

<sup>28</sup>Steinbeck, *Winter of Our Discontent*, 311.



many significant insights into life in America. The desire for travel from *Here* is constantly emphasized and may imply an uncertainty which arises with an increase in affluence.<sup>29</sup>

Steinbeck felt the pulse of America through his travels and revealed a latent desire of most citizens to reach the uncluttered life of the wide open spaces and simple surroundings. He implies the opportunity to meditate would be helpful for everyone as they face the cares of life.

## Conclusion

Finding the meaning of life is usually not discovered in the writings of Steinbeck. It is fair to state, however, that though it is sentimentally written, there often is a kind of redemption. *In Dubious Battle* concludes with the death of Jim Nolan, but his death is not without hope, for it inspires the pickers to persevere forward together.<sup>30</sup> In his later novels, particularly following the Second World War, redemption is more difficult to detect for it becomes a subtle assertion that man will at some point come to his senses. While Steinbeck is most profound in his analysis of the problems of modern man, he is almost naïve regarding its solution. In fairness to Steinbeck it should be stated that he accepts responsibility to lead the reader, much like the mother eagle does her young. The day must come when, though they seem totally unprepared, they will be flung from the high crag to try their own wings. It is at this very point that the Christian Gospel becomes relevant to our age. The Christian faith is not intended to be an anesthetic, but rather a pulsating and dynamic realism that God holds the key to a solution. True Christians cannot provide a complete answer, but they do have a certain hope. The New Testament makes this abundantly clear in the statement. "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and I am sure he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."<sup>31</sup>

Steinbeck, as one commentator said, "dramatized what the Bible has said all along: God is on the side of the downtrodden."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley* (New York: Viking, 1961), 26.

<sup>30</sup>Steinbeck, *Dubious Battle*, 223.

<sup>31</sup>2 Timothy 1:12b, RSV.

<sup>32</sup>Mark Storer, "The Good News According to Twain, Steinbeck and Dickens, *Christianity Today* (April 22, 2002), 72.

# ‘YOU FECKLESS THUG’: PROTEST THEODICY ON THE *WEST* *WING* TELEVISION SERIES



By Warren McWilliams

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## Introduction

Have you ever been mad at God? Car wrecks, hurricanes, or the notification of a terminal illness might create a sense of outrage for a believer in God, especially in believers in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Although much of network television ignores such theological issues as the relation of God to the evil and suffering in ordinary human existence, religious themes occurred regularly on the NBC television series *West Wing*. Although the series ended in May 2006 after seven seasons, fans and theologians of popular culture continue to reflect on this popular series.<sup>1</sup>

President Bartlet’s Roman Catholicism, as well as the Jewish faith of characters such as Toby Ziegler, was highlighted in several episodes. A full study of religious themes in the series would extend this study too far, but a few examples will help set the stage for the study of protest theodicy.<sup>2</sup> For example, the “Shibboleth” episode in the second season stressed the true nature of faith. President Bartlet wanted to verify that some Chinese refugees were truly trying to escape religious persecution. After being quizzed by Bartlet about his knowledge of Bible facts, his Chinese guest stressed that genuine faith was not a “shibboleth,” alluding to the story in Judges 12 about the inability of the Ephraimites to say that word correctly. In “Take This Sabbath Day” (first season), Bartlet struggled with whether to allow the execution of a criminal. Eventually

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<sup>1</sup>For a good introduction to critical analysis of the earlier seasons, see Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor, eds., *The West Wing: The American Presidency as Television Drama* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003). For a recent theological analysis of popular culture, see Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>For an introduction to religious themes in the early seasons, see Nancy Haught, “‘West Wing’ and a Prayer,” *The Oregonian*, Feb. 20, 2001 [online article]; available from <http://b4a.healthyinterest.net/news/000060.html>; accessed Feb. 20, 2001.

he got advice from a Quaker, a Jewish rabbi, and a Roman Catholic priest. He allowed the execution to proceed, but at the end of the episode Bartlet offered his confession to his priest. "Isaac and Ishmael," a special episode on the third season, focused on a discussion of Islamic extremism with the West Wing staff and some high school students.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the treatment of evil and suffering on two key episodes in this series, "Two Cathedrals" and "In God We Trust." To anticipate the conclusion of the paper, I will argue that the creators of the "West Wing" series have presented the struggles of believers in God in an engaging manner, depicting their struggles with faith and doubt in a way that resonates with the witness of the Bible and contemporary Christian experience. In particular, these two episodes depict two versions of what theologians describe as protest theodicy. Protest theodicy is a style or type of theodicy that is specifically concerned with the moral character of God. This kind of theodicy raises concerns about God's apparent lack of goodness in light of life's troubles.

## Two Cathedrals

"West Wing" ended its second season with a powerful episode entitled "Two Cathedrals." Although the main plot revolves around the question of whether or not President Josiah Bartlet, portrayed by Martin Sheen, would run for re-election, one of the most gripping scenes occurred in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. President Bartlet's secretary, Mrs. Landingham, had been killed in a car wreck in the previous episode. She had recently purchased a new vehicle and was killed by a drunk driver. Bartlet had known her since he attended prep school where his father was the principal. Bartlet was a committed Roman Catholic while the prep school was Protestant. The young Bartlet had objected to a worship service in the prep school sanctuary, but his father had defended it as ecumenical.

Now that his secretary has been killed in a senseless car wreck, Bartlet and the rest of the President's team attend a memorial service in the National Cathedral. When the service is over, the President orders the sanctuary sealed. As he walks toward the altar area, he begins to talk to God. In a mixture of English and Latin, he protests the injustice of his secretary's death. He calls God a "feckless thug." Addressing God, Bartlet insists that he had tried to accomplish some good in his first term in office, even though he had deceived the nation and his staff about being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "Am I really to believe that these are the acts of a loving God? A just God? A wise God? To hell with your punishments. I was your servant here on Earth. And I spread your word and I did your work. To hell with your punishments."<sup>3</sup> As he leaves the sanctuary, he lights a cigarette, smokes it briefly, and then tosses it irreverently on the floor of the cathedral.

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<sup>3</sup>Quotes from "'West Wing' Season Ends with Tirade, Questions," [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) [online article]; available from [http://www.westwingepguide.com/S2/Episodes/44\\_TC.html](http://www.westwingepguide.com/S2/Episodes/44_TC.html); accessed on May 17, 2001.

Although God does not respond directly to Bartlet's passionate outburst, the spirit or ghost of Mrs. Landingham does talk to him later in the episode: "God doesn't make cars crash, and you know it. Stop using me as an excuse."<sup>4</sup> Then Bartlet decides to run for re-election.

The President's outrage at God for allowing the death of Bartlet's secretary focuses our attention on a classic and recurring issue in theology and the lives of ordinary believers. The existence of evil and suffering in a world created and governed by an almighty and omnibenevolent God has troubled Jews, Christians, and other monotheists for centuries. The issue is sometimes nicknamed "theodicy," a technical term derived from the Greek words for God (theos) and justice (dike). Theodicy can refer either to the question "Is God just?" or to the many attempts by philosophers, theologians and others to answer the question. Theologically, the difficulty is balancing the power of God and his goodness in the face of evil and suffering. The issue is sometimes described as a trilemma, a theological concern with three major components. 1) If God is all-powerful, why does he cause evil or allow it to happen? 2) If God is all-good, why does he want evil to exist? 3) If God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then why does evil exist?<sup>5</sup>

Among the many efforts to deal rationally with the theodicy issue, according to Princeton theologian Daniel Migliore, three might be considered classic responses.<sup>6</sup> First, the reason for evil and suffering might be incomprehensible to our finite minds. This appeal to ultimate mystery frustrates some believers, however, who want to know why they have experienced suffering. Second, suffering is often seen as punishment for sin. Suffering, in other words, is divine retribution. Humans misuse their freedom and divine punishment results. Third, others suggest that suffering provides the opportunity for the sufferer to experience spiritual development in this life.

The subject of theodicy continues to concern theologians.<sup>7</sup> Some have even insisted that the whole enterprise of developing rational, philosophical attempts to answer the theodicy question should be abandoned.<sup>8</sup> Among contemporary efforts to deal with evil and suffering, the one that

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted in David Waters, "God Is With Us, Even If We Think Not," Beliefnet, [online article] available from <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/Movies/2001/06/God-Is-With-Us-Even-If-We-Think-Not.aspx>; accessed June 7, 2001.

<sup>5</sup>For a recent study, see Warren McWilliams, *Where Is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), xiii-xvii.

<sup>6</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 106-108.

<sup>7</sup>For a good overview of recent theodicies, see Dan R. Stiver, "The Problem of Theodicy," *Review & Expositor* 93 (Fall, 1996): 507-517.

<sup>8</sup>For example, Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), especially 221-55.

seems to fit the President's outrage against God in the National Cathedral is protest theodicy.<sup>9</sup> "Protest theodicy" has become the scholarly nickname for the passionate expression of a sense of injustice against God. The believer protests against God, stressing that a good and loving God would not allow such an injustice to occur. Rather than defending God's justice, the believer quarrels with God over his apparent injustice in governing the world.<sup>10</sup> John Roth describes his protest theodicy as a form of antitheodicy. "Antitheodicy or a theodicy of protest puts God on trial, and in that process the issue of God's wasteful complicity in evil takes center stage."<sup>11</sup>

Protest theodicy is often voiced in such strong emotional language that other believers in God feel uneasy around the protester. One aspect of the thesis of this paper is, however, that President Bartlet's outrage over the unnecessary death of his beloved secretary is consistent with the depiction of the experience of other believers in the Bible and in Christian history.

The Bible provides many examples of God's people voicing moral protests against God or appealing to God's moral character.<sup>12</sup> For instance, when Abraham learned that God intended to destroy Sodom for its sin, he asked, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23 NRSV). As Abraham seems to barter with God about the number of righteous necessary to exempt the city of Sodom from destruction, Abraham asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25). Typical of other advocates of protest theodicy, Abraham never seems to question God's power. Rather, Abraham's concern was with the apparent contradiction between God's goodness and the evil he was causing or, in other situations, allowing to happen.

The book of Psalms includes several examples of a genre Bible scholars label "lament." These laments often include a note of protest as well as an appeal for God to live up to his good character. For many Christians the most famous lament might be Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus quoted these words as he was dying on the cross (Matt. 27:46). Although many Psalms report the psalmist's experience of deliverance by God, Psalm 88 lacks such a note of hope. The writer agonizes, "O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?" (Ps. 88:14). The psalm ends without any hint of reassurance that a

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<sup>9</sup>For a brief introduction, see Migliore, 111-112. The term was popularized by John K. Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, new ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1-20.

<sup>10</sup>James M. Wall, "Quarreling with God," *Christian Century*, June 6-13, 2001, 36.

<sup>11</sup>Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest," 6.

<sup>12</sup>See Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1990) for a full study of this trajectory in Jewish life. Also, T. A. Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over: Jonah's Argument with God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

good, loving, all-powerful God will do anything to help the sufferer. Psalm 88 has been described as “the most dangerous, unresolved, and hopeless of all the psalms.”<sup>13</sup>

The texts in the book of Jeremiah traditionally nicknamed the “confessions” include candid statements of protest theodicy. One of the starkest of these statements compares Jeremiah’s experience to being seduced or raped by God (Jer. 20:7): “O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.” To borrow the title of one of Phyllis Trible’s works, Jeremiah’s words are a text of terror, typical of protest theodicy.<sup>14</sup> Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann noted that for the Hebrews “what is called theodicy is not explanation but protest.”<sup>15</sup>

The book of Job offers several instances of anger at God. In the middle poetic sections of the book, Job does not seem “patient” (James 5:11 KJV). Rather, he frequently protests that he has not committed the kinds of sin that deserve this punishment (Job 31:1-40), and he often demands an audience with God (Job 13:3-4; 23:3-7). The book of Job ends with God appearing to Job and asking him questions, implicitly reaffirming the distinction between creator and creature.

Numerous Christians across the centuries could identify with the fictional President Bartlet’s anger at God. The experience of C. S. Lewis would be familiar to many today. A widely read Christian apologist from the mid-twentieth century, Lewis’s life and writings have experienced a kind of renaissance in recent years, partly due to the film *Shadowlands*, based on his wife’s death from cancer, and the release of the live-action versions of the *The Chronicles of Narnia*, beginning with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 2005.

In the early 1940s Lewis had written a classic study on the theodicy issue entitled *The Problem of Pain*. In the 1950s he met and married Joy Davidman Gresham. When she died from cancer, his faith in God was shaken. His candid account of his grief, *A Grief Observed*, epitomizes some of the salient features of protest theodicy. For example, he was so upset with God that he called him a “Cosmic Sadist” and compared God to a vivisectionist treating humans as his laboratory rats.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Lewis was not tempted to quit believing in God, but he questioned the moral character of a God who would allow Lewis’s beloved Joy to die an untimely death.

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<sup>13</sup>Tyron L. Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 111.

<sup>14</sup>Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

<sup>15</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 739.

<sup>16</sup>C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam, 1976 reprint), 35, 44.

Although Lewis and President Bartlet both voice moral outrage at God for allowing loved ones to die before their time, they both moved on to a restored faith. Bartlet's anguish in the "Two Cathedrals" episode was not duplicated in later episodes. When his good friend Leo McGarry died in the seventh season, the screenplay writers did not dwell on Bartlet's grief. The "Requiem" episode depicts Leo's funeral, but the characters do not demonstrate the outrage Bartlet expressed when Mrs. Landingham died. For Bartlet and Lewis the moral outrage against God seems to have been a step in the process of emotionally and theologically dealing with an injustice in life.

One contemporary theologian, Dorothy Soelle, has helpfully identified three stages to the process of suffering.<sup>17</sup> Although believers do not always work through this process in a predictable way, the three stages do fit the experience of many sufferers. The first stage is the experience of numbness or shock at the onset of tragedy. Second, the sufferer experiences outrage about the situation. Third, the sufferer begins to deal with the problem as concretely and practically as possible.

Protest theodicy seems to be a fixation on the second stage of the experience of suffering. President Bartlet, perhaps through the help of family and friends, was able to maintain his faith in God. Some, however, who protest the injustices of this world become agnostics or atheists. Ivan Karamazov, who rejected God in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, is a frequently cited example of "protest atheism," an atheism that often begins with protest theodicy concerns.<sup>18</sup>

Protest theodicy, as illustrated by the experiences of President Bartlet and C. S. Lewis, differs from other more theoretical, traditional theodicies in several ways. First, in protest theodicy the sufferer focuses on concerns about God's goodness more than his power. Although several divine attributes are crucial to the subject of theodicy, protest theodicy highlights the question of the character of God. Is God good, or is he the sufferer's enemy? Lewis, for instance, wrote, "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is coming to believe such dreadful things about Him."<sup>19</sup>

Second, the sufferer blames God for the evil and suffering she has experienced or observed. Although many theodicies include the roles of Satan and humans, Bartlet assumes God is in charge of human affairs. He addresses his complaints to God because, apparently, God is totally to blame for Mrs. Landingham's death. When Mrs. Landingham's spirit meets Bartlet in the oval office after the funeral service, she reminds him that God does not cause drunk drivers. Viewers are prompted to realize that although God is sovereign, God allows humans to abuse their freedom through actions such as drunk driving. One of the most popular theodicies involves the

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<sup>17</sup>Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 70-74.

<sup>18</sup>See Jürgen Moltman, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 220-223.

<sup>19</sup>Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 5.

so-called free-will defense, which stresses that the misuse of human free will explains much of the suffering we experience. Job the man addressed his concerns to God; he was ignorant of the role of Satan. Sophisticated theodicies deal with competing views such as monergism and synergism, or the relationship of divine causation to secondary causation (human freedom, natural forces).<sup>20</sup>

Third, protest theodicy is more emotional than intellectual in tone. Already we have seen that protest theodicy might correlate with the second stage of the experience of suffering, the stage of lament and moral outrage. C. S. Lewis realized that his outbursts were feelings rather than thoughts.<sup>21</sup> In an earlier book he noted that our emotional response to bad situations can “carry on a sort of blitz on belief.”<sup>22</sup> Bartlet apparently moved beyond the emotions that led to the outburst in the National Cathedral.

### In God We Trust

Although protest theodicy did not surface as a major theme in later episodes of the “West Wing” series, religious themes continued to appear. The “In God We Trust” episode in the sixth season treated the relationship of faith and doubt in a candid way. President Bartlet had invited Arnold Vinick, the Republican candidate for President, to visit him at the White House. Eating ice cream together, the two men discussed the separation of church and state and the role of a candidate’s personal religious beliefs in his decision-making. Vinick rarely attended church, and some of his advisers thought he should make an appearance at a church for a photo-op to enhance his election chances.

When Bartlet probed Vinick’s faith or lack thereof, Vinick mentioned that his wife had given him an early edition of the King James translation of the Bible. Vinick read it and was disturbed by what he found. Bartlet stressed that a literal interpretation of all parts of the Bible was not wise. Vinick replied that he was bothered that God would endorse the death penalty for violating the Sabbath or adultery but did not criticize the institution of slavery. Vinick concluded that after he struggled with the Bible for awhile he quit struggling, suggesting he had become an agnostic or an atheist.

Vinick’s stance in this brief encounter with Bartlet epitomizes another version of protest theodicy. Rather than arising from a tragedy, such as the death of a loved one, Vinick’s concern with God’s character results from a careful reading of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Although Vinick

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<sup>20</sup>See Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 115-51, for a review of several theories of causation.

<sup>21</sup>Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 38-41.

<sup>22</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 123.



may have protested what he discovered in the Bible in an emotional way at times, his chat with Bartlet is cooler and more intellectual than Bartlet's emotional display in "Two Cathedrals."

Protest theodicy, such as Vinick's, could be a protest against the apparent injustice of God in the laws he gave to the Hebrews in the days of Moses. In other words, how could a good and loving God promote a legal system that punished people for so many sins? The death penalty could be enforced for many sins and crimes in the Old Testament world. Many Christians today endorse capital punishment, but they are reluctant to consider all of the Old Testament capital offenses relevant today.

Although Bartlet and Vinick did not broach the general issue of the relevance of the Old Testament law for Christians today or for the general public, that issue troubles some who see aspects of the Hebrew law as cruel and inhumane. In "The Midterms" episode Bartlet had attacked a conservative Christian radio talk-show host, apparently modeled after Dr. Laura Schlessinger, for her legalistic interpretation of Hebrew laws.

Vinick could have pushed his displeasure with the moral teachings of the Old Testament into the arena of the immoral actions of God's people. At least some of the actions of the heroes and heroines of the Old Testament seem immoral by contemporary standards.<sup>23</sup> For example, the practice of holy war in the book of Joshua includes the slaughter of innocent people in the name of Yahweh. Many Christian ethicists today would distinguish clearly between a holy war (or crusade) view and the more dominant view of just war. Likewise, Vinick and others might point to the actions of "saints" such as Abraham, who lied twice that Sarah was his sister rather than his wife, thereby protecting his own life while endangering her virtue. The biblical authors often did not explicitly criticize the immoral behavior of people later considered saints. In general, the biblical narratives reported behavior without suggesting a recommendation to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Vinick's concerns with the morality of the Hebrew God have energized people across the centuries. One of the classic responses to this concern is to stress the discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>24</sup> In early Christian history Marcion resolved this apparent tension between the two testaments by rejecting the Old Testament and its God completely. He affirmed the loving God of Jesus but rejected the stern, cruel God he saw in the Old Testament. The early church rejected Marcion's solution, maintaining that both testaments are integral to the

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<sup>23</sup>For evangelical treatments of some of these issues, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), chapters 16-18, and John W. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 89-118.

<sup>24</sup>For a balanced overview of the relation of the two testaments, see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010).

written word of God. Christian theologians have wrestled with the relation of the two testaments in the biblical canon in many ways, including the notion of progressive revelation. Progressive revelation suggests that God revealed more and more about himself as humans matured.

### Beyond Protest Theodicy?

This brief discussion of two episodes from “West Wing” has focused on two variations on what theologians today call protest theodicy. Bartlet’s agonized outrage against God in the National Cathedral in “Two Cathedrals” epitomizes the more common form of protest theodicy. A firm believer in God, he is shocked that a loving, wise, all-powerful God would allow a good person such as Mrs. Landingham to die in a car wreck. Bartlet, however, seems to have moved through a process of grief that allowed him to maintain his faith in God throughout the seven seasons of the series.

Arnold Vinick, on the other hand, was so troubled by the immorality of God’s laws, especially in the Old Testament, that he decided to quit struggling with the Bible and, apparently, had no faith in God. Implicitly, at least, Vinick’s version of protest theodicy relates to larger theological issues such as the nature of divine revelation, the relation of the two testaments in the biblical canon, and the character of God.

Protest theodicy, in either form, appeals to many people today partly because of its honesty about God, faith, and doubt. The moral outrage of President Bartlet about Mrs. Landingham’s death resonates with many believers who have suffered a senseless loss. One danger of such a protest theodicy, however, is the tone of self-righteousness that sometimes accompanies the outrage. Some fellow believers may think that the advocate of protest theodicy comes too close to blasphemy. How, they might suggest, can a finite human being dare challenge almighty God? Job’s friends, for instance, seemed to think that Job went too far in demanding an audience with God. An evangelical Christian criticized Bartlet in “Two Cathedrals” for seeing himself as “something like a heavenly power broker; he had, he reminds God, created jobs, fed the hungry, and even managed to get a good liberal on the bench.”<sup>25</sup>

Not every believer who suffers experiences protest theodicy. Some believers experience great loss and never challenge God’s goodness or power. Whether these believers have a stronger faith than those who voice outrage or simply refuse to acknowledge some inner struggle is not the point of this paper. I do recall, however, a conversation with some good Christian friends. After attending a church meeting with them, I mentioned I needed to get home to watch “West Wing.” My friends noted that they had quit watching the series after the “Two Cathedrals” episode. They could not watch a show that depicted someone cursing God. Because of my long-term personal

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<sup>25</sup>Eric Miller, “The CT Review: The Children of Light,” *Christianity Today* [Online magazine]; available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/october1/31.73.html>; accessed on December 8, 2011.

and professional interest in the theodicy issue, however, I had found “Two Cathedrals” to be one of the most engaging episodes on network television in many years.

Aaron Sorkin, the creator of the “West Wing” series, noted in an interview that he was captivated by the animated discussions of the book of Genesis on Bill Moyers’s public television show. Sorkin commented, “And I thought, boy, I want to start one of these conversations, too—the upshot of which was essentially that God is extremely more complicated than we can imagine.”<sup>26</sup> Scripts such as “Two Cathedrals” and “In God We Trust” can create a welcome conversation among viewers about God, evil, suffering, faith, and doubt.

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<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Haught.

## When We Go Down to Bethlehem...

William Mitchell

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When we go down to Bethlehem  
in memory or prayer,  
our hearts fill grateful to the brim  
that Christ will meet us there—  
our words are praise, our song is hymn,  
and all we find is fair.

But in uncertain desert reaches,  
where the heart is chafed with grief,  
even the firm faith beseeches  
strength and courage and relief—  
our hope blunts out, our trust runs dry—  
“Where is your comfort now?” we cry.

Lord, let us all our pilgrimage  
walk in the Savior's ways,  
till grief and trial, age by age,  
grow testaments of grace—  
all flesh a temple of the Lord  
and every breath his praise.

## The Calling of Levi

— William Mitchell —

Their dull eyes flickered with hate  
human cattle who came  
all day to the customs gate  
the rich, the wretched, the old  
cursed me aloud in the street  
sneered and spat and paid  
called me traitor and cheat  
but paid me shekels of gold.  
Silent, stony-eyed,  
I hated them back with the hate  
nothing can know but shame.

Silver shekels and gold  
counted and piled in their places  
gathered, multiplied—  
even when Caesar was paid  
there would be gold to spend.  
what did I care for their hate  
what did I care for my shame

At length, at the day's end  
came a clamoring throng  
surging with laugh and song  
their labor-bitten faces  
lifted and flushed and wild  
lit with the hope of a child

Among them a rabbi walked,  
his eyes silent and warm  
his robe heavy with dust  
his eloquent, sunburned hand  
lay like a poem of trust  
on his disciple's arm.  
Quietly they talked  
together, friend to friend.  
I did not understand.

So he came to the excise  
in the midst of the sick and the lame  
and paused where I sat by the way —  
he brought no gold to pay

but he measured my eyes with his eyes  
read my face like a scroll  
tallied the years of lies  
sorted the anguish and shame  
plumbed the wells of my thirst —  
weighed and summed the whole.  
There was no hiding from him.  
But he spoke no loathing nor blame,  
neither chided nor cursed —  
his eyes were knowing and calm.  
I read his face like a psalm.

And his countenance burned like a star  
and sudden the sun grew dim  
and the noise grew muffled and far  
and my flesh grew passive and numb  
and I heard his beckoning voice  
speak a winsome, sure command—  
Come, he whispered, Come.

And I heard the voice like a hymn  
and I looked at the gold in my hand  
grown pale in foreshortening day  
and I looked at the infinite street  
leading ever and away  
like an irreversible choice

and my old life dropped at my feet  
like a rotten winding-sheet,  
and I left it all where it lay  
and arose, and followed him.

## Benediction

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*William Mitchell*

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Let there be light in all the nightmare places,  
in the millrace of license, in the stifled room;  
let there be joy in starved and leaden faces,  
in charred or sodden furrows, where no tears bloom.

Where stumbling feet, where fumbling hands are groping  
against the scope of silence, in dumb primordial caves,  
let chords of morning stars bring prised hoping,  
and sing far up the slope, where mind blinds out and raves.

Say for me, God, their blessing I am seeking;  
Lord, decree for them the sun, and Jesus speak aright  
my scattered syllables; for past my yearning, past my speaking,  
I have been stammering, let there be light.



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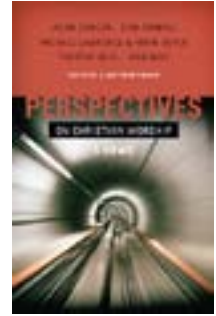
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*Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. Pp. 352, \$24.99 paperback.

Books are frequently released in the evangelical community on the subject of worship. Unfortunately, many of these monographs focus on the narrow confines of music, technology, or similar issues. J. Matthew Pinson's *Perspective on Christian Worship: Five Views* offers much more. While it is one of many edited volumes in Broadman & Holman's "Perspectives" series, it is as relevant and timely as any.



Matt Pinson's introductory essay is a well researched overview of the history of Christian worship. He offers two salient observations: First, "worship in the early church was relatively simple" (1). On the basis of many early church studies, he asserts that it was not until the fourth century that Christian worship became more ornate, complex, and highly acculturated. Second, the underlying dynamic that has characterized, and to some extent still characterizes, many of the differences among worship traditions is the tension between fidelity to Scripture and tradition, and the desire to be relevant to outsiders. It is these two observations by Pinson that help the reader to evaluate the five approaches to worship that unfold over the next 300+ pages.

Timothy Quill offers the chapter on liturgical worship. Quill says the Liturgy consists primarily of two elements: 1) The Service of the Word, and 2) The Service of Holy Communion. All other elements of worship accompany and flow out of these. Quill asserts with confidence that while some aspects of worship today could be considered *adiaphoron* (non-essentials), this historic vision of worship is biblical, fosters reverence, creates unity, and performs other functions that stems the tide of what he sees as the shallowing of Protestant worship (29). Quill responds to this trend by outlining a vision of the worshipping church as a counterculture—"a culture unlike any other" (30). The structure and content of the liturgy achieves this. Quill shows how the tradition has related various liturgical elements of worship to Scripture. He strongly defends the formality and ceremonial nature of Liturgical worship. These ceremonies "have faithfully given expression to the pure doctrine and faith revealed in Christ" (31). The historic liturgy is a superior approach due to its benefits (which he enumerates), and also because it represents a tradition that is richer than worship that quickly concedes to passing trends. At the heart of liturgical worship, in Quill's view, is Christ. For him, "the Liturgy and the sermon are *evangelical*—gospel or gift-centered" (55). They are the place where the Lord gives out His gifts to the worshipper.

Ligon Duncan describes traditional evangelical worship. Perhaps the most important statement that summarizes Duncan's view is this: "Read the Bible. Preach the Bible. Pray the Bible. Sing the Bible. See the Bible" (105). In this simple credo, one is able to glimpse his way of unfolding and applying the regulative principle of worship to the church. Scripture alone should guide worship and provide its content. Duncan, like Quill, is concerned about the impulse to look outside the Christian tradition to inform the purpose, content, and shape of Christian worship. In contrast to this impulse, Duncan argues that "the great concern of traditional evangelical worship is for the

heart, form, and content of congregational worship to be biblical” (104). Traditional evangelical worship has been and should continue to be characterized by it being scriptural, corporate, Christ-centered, simple, reverent, and joyful. Duncan’s presentation is significantly influenced by the Westminster Confession of Faith, especially concerning how he believes evangelicals have traditionally implemented the regulative principle.

Contemporary worship is explained by Dan Wilt. Music is at the heart of this approach. Wilt’s emphasis on song is wed closely to his understanding of the psalms, as well as his analysis and understanding of Christianity in culture. Worship is primarily a music-driven enterprise both for the corporate praise of God’s people, as well as a means for drawing seekers into the worshipping community. In Wilt’s words, “Contemporary worship engages culture on the levels of language, music, intimacy, emotion, simplicity, and story” (159). Cultural relevance is an important priority for Wilt. His commitment to music and other aspects of worship differ significantly from most of the rest of the book (for example, preaching was absent altogether). While I’m sure Wilt believes in other elements, the corporate experience of singing is at the heart of worship that is relevant to contemporary culture.

Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence offer their perspective on blended worship. While this chapter is quite similar to Duncan’s, it contains some important nuances. Dever and Lawrence, like Duncan, are committed to the regulative principle in worship. However, they feel it important to make careful distinctions between “the activities God has instituted for His worship in Scripture, either by precept, normative example or good and necessary implication” (elements), and the ways these elements are accomplished (forms and circumstances) in worship (236). They further contend that when Scripture comprises worship, and once forms and circumstances are carefully considered, worship should be orderly, intelligible, edifying, unifying, and reverent. For them, blended worship means “various forms for invariable elements,” while not being naïve about the cultural baggage attached to particular forms (233). This chapter is uniquely helpful in that it provides some actual templates for a blended worship services.

Dan Kimball’s chapter on emerging worship is perhaps the most unique in the entire volume. He is surprisingly affirmative of all the other approaches, believing that they all contribute to the worship experience of evangelicals. However, he makes this claim because those expressions demonstrate what he believes churches have always done and continue to do in worship: “The specific ways we worship in most churches today are neither directed nor informed by the Scriptures themselves, but rather evolved from people in church leadership, reflecting the culture of their time” (294). Kimball says that Scripture is limited in its actual description of worship and, as a result, the emphasis should be on “how people’s lives are actually being changed by the Spirit as they encounter God in worship than the ways we actually practice worship (provided we are not violating Scripture)” (295). The expressions of worship that connect with how people commune with God today are valuable because they are culturally contextualized for those in the emerging culture—those the church today is not reaching. Kimball thinks emphasizing tools such as multimedia, the arts, and special spaces in worship can counteract this trend. While he

does not reject traditional forms, primacy is given to current cultural forms that convey truth and facilitate meaningful worship experiences.

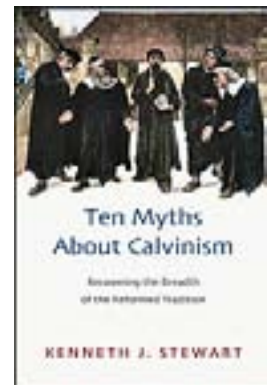
Like all books that explore multiple perspectives, this volume has its strengths and limitations. The theme of continuity with tradition versus contemporary relevance runs throughout the entire volume, which proves to be helpful in uncovering key theological commitments. In particular, how each author articulates the purpose of worship is crucial to how they determine its content and form. Blended worship and traditional evangelical worship are quite similar, while the dominant value of cultural relevance pervades both the contemporary and emerging chapters.

In some ways, seeing all five views as historically representative raises some questions. After all, where in the history of Christendom can “emerging worship” be seen? Still, each author utilizes Scripture in articulating with honesty and clarity precisely what their perspective entails. While the editor, Matt Pinson, admits that the scope of the book could have been different than the views represented, he feels these best embody the breadth of what can be found in Protestant churches today. I think he succeeds in offering evangelical readers a resource for understanding what they might encounter in worship today.

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*Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition.* By Kenneth J. Stewart. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011. 301 pp., \$24 paper.

The subject of Calvinism and Reformed Theology has been one of the “hottest” topics in the evangelical world generally, and among Southern Baptists in particular. *Ten Myths about Calvinism* makes a valuable contribution to that dialogue. It is authored by Kenneth Stewart, a professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Georgia, who embraces Reformed Theology but writes with a balance and fairness that is missing in many discussions of this controversial topic.



Of the ten “myths” about Calvinism that Stewart proposes, the first four are myths he believes that Calvinists are circulating, but they should not be doing so. These four Calvinist-propounded myths are:

- (1) that one man (John Calvin) and one city (Geneva) is determinative of all of Calvinism,
- (2) that Calvin’s view of predestination must be ours,

- (3) that the “TULIP” is an appropriate yardstick concerning who is truly Reformed in theology, and
- (4) that Calvinists take a dim view of revival and awakening.

*Myth 1: One man (John Calvin) and one city (Geneva) is determinative of all of Calvinism.* --

Stewart builds a convincing and well-documented case that Calvin’s writings were impactful in his own day, but no more so than Reformed leaders of other Swiss cantons. Calvin’s theological impact had “actually gone into eclipse by the late sixteenth century” (29), and a hybrid form of “Anglo-Calvinism” that had blended with other traditions had emerged (29). Indeed, even in Geneva, Anglican evangelical writer Thomas Haweis remarked in 1800 that “I doubt if there remains a single professor or pastor at Geneva who adheres to Calvin” (25); and British visitor Henry Drummond was unable to find a single volume of Calvin’s *Institutes* available for sale in Geneva in 1817 (31). It was Victorian England that brought a resurgence of interest in Calvin’s thought by republishing and promulgating his works. In tracing the influence of the other Reformed thinkers other than Calvin himself, Stewart is, as the subtitle of the book indicates, attempting to recover the full breadth of the Reformed tradition.

*Myth 2: Calvin’s view of predestination must be ours.* -- Stewart also provides compelling evidence to debunk the second “myth,” that Calvin’s view of predestination must be ours. First of all, Stewart traces the development of the doctrine of predestination in Calvin’s own thought. In the first edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin endorsed only a modest “consolatory” perspective on predestination, that is, as an assurance of the salvation of believers (49); and a confession penned by Calvin in the same year (1536) to which all the residents of Geneva had to subscribe did not even mention predestination or election (49). It was only after Calvin’s expulsion from Geneva and his contact with the higher predestination view of Martin Bucer in Strasbourg that Calvin took a stronger stance on predestination (51-56). Key second-generation Reformed leaders such as Heinrich Bullinger and Peter Martyr Vermigli soft-pedaled Calvin’s perspective on predestination, particularly with regard to unbelievers. It was largely the third generation of Reformed thinkers (principally Theodore Beza and William Perkins) who developed and popularized the stronger Reformed view of predestination (57-63). However, most standard Reformed confessions follow Bullinger and the softer “consolatory” view of predestination, namely the Formula of Concord of 1577 (in Lutheranism), the Articles of the Church of England (1547, 1563), the Belgic Confession of 1559, the Scots Confession of 1560, the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, and the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 (63-65).

*Myth 3: The ‘TULIP’ acronym is an appropriate yardstick concerning who is truly Reformed in theology.* --

It is Stewart’s third “myth” (that the “TULIP” acrostic is not regulative of what is or is not legitimate Reformed Theology) that has garnered the most comment about this book and is probably its greatest contribution. Stewart notes that the “sovereign grace” school of Calvinism has considered the TULIP as a “sacrosanct” historical formula, while the “apologetic” school of Calvinism attempted to alter and reword the acrostic to soften its negative impact on non-Calvinist hearers. Stewart asserts, however, that both of these schools are “unwittingly working

from a mistaken premise,” namely the “unwarranted belief” and “common assumption that the acronym TULIP is itself historic” (76-77).

Stewart traces how Calvinist theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries addressed the five doctrines arising from the Synod of Dort utilizing a variety of terms – none of them using the TULIP acrostic. The use of the TULIP acrostic as we now know it does not appear in the record until the twentieth century. The earliest published references are in a periodical article by R. M. Vail in 1913 (reprinted in the appendix of this book), which Vail took from some lectures by a Dr. McAfee in 1905 (291-92). The earliest best-known published source Stewart found (78-79, 86-87) was Loraine Boettner’s 1932 book *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. However, even Boettner warned against “a too close identification of the Five Points and the Calvinist system.”<sup>1</sup>

Stewart provides a useful chart summarizing how each of the major Reformed theologians in the last few decades has utilized the TULIP (93-95). Since Stewart asserts that the TULIP acronym is built on a misunderstanding of the historical basis of this acronym, he challenges the “slavish, unquestioning loyalty” to the five points (87). Noting that various Reformed confessions do not align with the five points of the TULIP, Stewart boldly states, “Calling the paraphrasing of Dordt by TULIP a broad-brush approach is arguably too kind. TULIP cannot be allowed to function as a creed” (93).

*Myth 4: Calvinists take a dim view of revivals and awakenings.*-- Stewart does not build as strong a historical basis for the fourth “myth,” that Calvinists take a dim view of revivals and awakenings. While he notes the involvement of some Calvinists in various awakenings and revivals, he must also list others who opposed the awakenings and revivals. For the most part, Stewart is offering only a moderately convincing apology for Calvinism in this chapter. The same is true for the next chapter – that Calvinists are largely antissionary.

The next six “myths” are those propagated by non-Calvinists, but Stewart believes they do so inappropriately. These six myths being circulated by non-Calvinists are:

- (5) that Calvinism is largely antissionary,
- (6) Calvinism is antinomian,
- (7) Calvinism promotes theocracy,
- (8) Calvinism undermines the creative arts,
- (9) Calvinism resists gender equity, and
- (10) Calvinism has engendered racial inequality.

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<sup>1</sup>Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), 59, cited in Stewart, 88.

*Myth 5: Calvinism is largely antimissionary.* -- Myth 4 (propagated by Calvinists) that Calvinists take a dim view of revivals and awakenings seems in some ways related to this Myth 5 (propagated by non-Calvinists), that Calvinism is largely antimissionary. Stewart's evidence is rather anecdotal, listing a few well-known Calvinist missionaries, but never providing adequate evidence that this was a pattern true of Calvinism as a whole. Stewart also drifts off-target in this chapter by addressing the missionary efforts of Catholics, Lutherans, and others, which does little to establish his premise about the missions efforts of Calvinists.

*Myths 6, 8, 9, and 10* – In each of these four “myths,” Stewart builds a fairly convincing case against the charges of antinomianism, undermining the creative arts, gender inequity, and racism. Some of these non-Calvinist “myths” might equally be said of other denominational traditions as well, though they may seem at points to attach to Reformed denominations more particularly. For example, the issue of racial inequality comes to mind for the Reformed tradition not only for their involvement in the slave trade in Europe and America, but for the more recent practice of apartheid in South Africa (in a nation dominated by a Dutch Reformed church). However, other evangelical denominations have their own challenges with many of these issues, and Stewart cites adequate counterexamples to demonstrate that this practice is not inherent in the Reformed tradition.

Having acknowledged that other denominations share some of these problems, and with the numerous counterexamples that Stewart lists against each of these non-Calvinist propagated “myths,” it would seem to establish the fact that these accusations are not accurate of all Calvinists, and not characteristic of Calvinists as a whole. However, non-Calvinist readers may still be left with some doubt. There was a reason that Stewart listed each of these myths – they are indeed common accusations about Calvinists, based on anecdotal evidence. For each of these four myths, it is easy to think of examples to demonstrate why such a charge might be made. It seems evident that there are at least *some* Calvinists, probably *many* Calvinists, for whom these charges are facts, not myths – or nobody would ever think such things. As the old saying goes, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” These accusations were not fabricated out of the air, but come from real life experience – and thus Calvinists should be on guard lest what is true of a few becomes characteristic of the whole. But again, Stewart builds a sufficient case to demonstrate that these charges do not pertain accurately to all Calvinists, and that they are not characteristic of the Reformed tradition as a whole.

*Myth 7: Calvinism promotes theocracy.* -- The way that Stewart frames Myth 7 – that Calvinism promotes theocracy – is disappointing in that it misses the main point of this concern or accusation about the Reformed tradition. It is true that the early Calvinist church-state unions were essentially theocracies. However, theocracies have been largely absent in Western culture outside the Arab world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, rather embarrassingly, Stewart’s discussion of the Calvinist Christian Reconstruction or Theonomy movement led by R. J. Rushdoony, Gary Bahnsen, and others is limited to a footnote at the end of the chapter. However, the key is not the narrow issue of theocracy, but the broader question of whether Calvinists resisted religious liberty and separation of church and state. Of this there can

be no question, despite Stewart's weak evidence to the contrary. Calvinism has thrived primarily in settings such as Geneva in which it was the official state religion, backed by the power of the government. On this issue, the record of Calvinists is not stellar. Allow me to challenge Stewart's anecdotal evidence with some counterevidence.

Unlike Calvinists, it was the Baptists who were separatists rather than establishmentarians, advocating religious liberty rather than the establishment of a state church. Many Baptists came to America seeking to avoid the religious persecution they had experienced in Europe only to find it transported to America as well. Roger Williams, pastor of the first Baptist church in America, was exiled to Rhode Island from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of his religious convictions, driven by the established Calvinist Congregationalist church. He protested against the religious persecution in Massachusetts in works such as *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution* (1644) and *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution, Made Yet More Bloody* (1652). Imprisonment, taxation, whipping, and seizure of property were commonplace vehicles of this persecution.

John Clarke, who detailed persecution by Calvinist authorities in *Ill News from New England*, was imprisoned with Obadiah Holmes for the "sin" of ministering in Massachusetts. Holmes was also brutally whipped thirty times with a three-pronged whip. Governor Endicott explained that these Baptist ministers were being imprisoned because they "denied infant baptism" and that they "deserved death."<sup>2</sup> Isaac Backus, originally a Congregationalist deeply influenced by Jonathan Edwards' theology, helped restore Calvinistic theology to the Separate Baptists. But he was tireless in writing tracts and petitions for religious liberty in Connecticut. His mother, like many Baptists, was imprisoned for thirteen weeks for refusing to pay the tax for the established Congregationalist church.<sup>3</sup>

The Baptist leader John Leland, after playing a key role in winning religious freedom in Virginia and helping obtain the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, moved back to Massachusetts and experienced even more persecution. He wrote tracts such as *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable; and therefore Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law: Or, The Highflying Churchman, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo* (1791), in which he called for religious liberty in Connecticut for not only Baptists but for "Jews, Turks, heathen, papists, or deists."<sup>4</sup> He even brought a 1,200 pound block of cheese to the White House on January 1, 1802, to lobby

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<sup>2</sup>William R. Estep, *Revolution within the Revolution: The First Amendment in Historical Context, 1612-1789* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 86-92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 97-119.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 157-70. John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable; and therefore Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law: Or, The High-Flying Churchman, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo*; available at <http://classicliberal.tripod.com/misc/conscience.html>; accessed on 2 January 2012.

President Jefferson for religious liberty.<sup>5</sup> The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution became federal law in 1791, but the Presbyterian/ Congregationalist established churches in the New England states continued to fight doggedly against disestablishment in their own states. The state of Massachusetts did not disestablish the Congregationalist state church until 1833, forty-two years after the First Amendment.<sup>6</sup> So while Baptists were at the forefront of the fight for religious liberty, Calvinists such as the Congregationalists fought it in a delaying action for four decades after the First Amendment granted freedom of religion. So, on this point, Stewart ignores a great amount of counterevidence and has not provided adequate evidence to substantiate his claim.

Stewart concludes *Ten Myths about Calvinism* with a reflective chapter which weaves together the various threads of Calvinism and makes his projections for the future of Calvinism. Entitled “Recovering Our Bearings: Calvinism in the Twenty-First Century,” Stewart recommends that Calvinism get more in touch with the diversity within its own tradition and urges his fellow Calvinists to reject triumphalism in favor of a humbler, more cooperative Calvinism that seeks out commonalities with other believers rather than constantly hammering away on areas of difference.

*Ten Myths about Calvinism* is a great read for any evangelical – a well-researched, well-documented, and interesting book. I believe that it will quickly become a standard book in the field; I already see references to it in numerous publications. Stewart’s scholarly, self-reflective, and irenic Calvinism stands in refreshing contrast to the arrogant, myopic, and belligerent Calvinism that one often encounters in the Christian bloggerworld and some publications. I strongly recommend this book whether you are a Calvinist or not. You will be enriched by reading it.

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen Waldman, “The Framers and the Faithful: How Modern Evangelicals Are Ignoring Their Own History,” *Washington Monthly* (April 2006); available at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2006/0604.waldman.html>; accessed on 2 January 2012.

<sup>6</sup>An excellent survey of disestablishment of state churches is provided by Carl Esbeck, “Dissent and Disestablishment: The Church-State Settlement in the Early American Republic,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* (February 6, 2004): 1-69; available at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3736/is\\_200402/ai\\_n9474018/pg\\_1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3736/is_200402/ai_n9474018/pg_1); accessed on 2 January 2012. Esbeck notes that for John Adams in 1775, disestablishing the state church was about as likely as dislodging the planets from their orbits in the solar system (44).



*Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*. Edited by Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011. 224 pages. \$16.99, paper.

We are “evangelicals.” I hear us self-identify with this term all the time, but what does it really mean? Others, with whom I do not regularly associate, also call themselves evangelicals. Are we all saying and meaning the same thing? Based on the title of this book, I was hoping to get these questions answered; but like most multi-view books, I was left wanting.



The selected authors, Kevin T. Bauder, R. Albert Mohler Jr., John G. Stackhouse Jr., and Roger E. Olson, seem to run the gamut from the extreme right to the extreme left; but do they? Olson opens his essay with an anecdote about running into an “evangelical Lutheran” (161). Doesn’t Alister McGrath call himself an evangelical Anglican? But the four scholars involved in this book’s discussion all hail from within conservative Baptist life. Arguably, they span the spectrum of conservative Baptists. Therefore, while the title might indicate that the book would explore the whole spectrum of evangelicalism, it actually represents only a narrow segment. It focuses on what conservative Baptists mean by “evangelical” and what was the result of the “evangelical movement” that started with the reorganization of Princeton Seminary in 1929 toward a more liberal theology (13-14).

The book is arranged from right to left beginning with the fundamentalist position and ending with the postconservative position. The argument is not so much over what “evangelical” means but how it’s applied. In other words, the question that is their main focus is who they include in the evangelical “tent” and who they exclude. One way to describe the shift from right to left is by looking at the walls each erects around his constituency. Bauder (fundamentalism) erects high solid walls that keep out all but those who completely agree to his strict perspective. Mohler’s walls (confessional evangelicalism) are a bit shorter and a little more permeable, but closely resembles those of Bauder. Stackhouse (generic evangelicalism) builds walls that are short and easily traversed, letting in all but the most extreme views. And Olson (postconservative evangelicalism) has walls that are so short and transparent that some question their very existence.

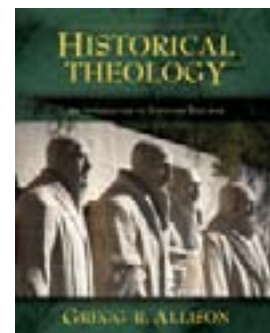
What we find between the covers is your standard multi-views book. All four authors are gracious to their dialogue partners. They spend a lot of time establishing the history of their specific position, and present biblical and experiential evidence for the superiority of their view. And like most books of this kind, we, the readers, have plenty of fuel to debate the selection of the scholars and whether they represent their views fairly. It’s all grist for the mill. For example, the most obvious issue with the authors is how the views of Bauder and Mohler are very close and the views of Stackhouse and Olson are very close. This issue is addressed in the summary at the end of the book, authored by Andrew David Naselli, who was instrumental in selling the need for this book to Zondervan (207). Naselli points out that “Views 1 and 2 (fundamentalism and confessional evangelicalism) are close to each other as are views 3 and 4 (generic and postconservative evangelicalism), and the distance between 1-2 and 3-4 is significantly greater than between views 1 and 2 or 3 and 4” (214). But this does not seem to be a problem for Naselli because, as he wrote on the previous page, “Not all evangelicals will identify with one of the four views in this book” (213). And he’s right. Rarely in any books of this type will we find ourselves in complete agreement with one particular position. To show four views out of an entire spectrum is begging for disagreement. Showing all possible positions is impractical, unwieldy, and counterproductive. The authors selected for this project have distinct perspectives and demonstrated a keen understanding of each of the various positions.

One of the highlights of the book is the final chapter that presents a comparison between the four views. Since the contributors are working through several important issues, the subtleties between them can become easily lost. Naselli's compares these issues across the spectrum placing each of the major points next to each other allowing us to see the subtleties between the views. Even though this is not the book I thought it was when I pick it up, it does a very good job of fulfilling its own mandate of presenting a discussion on who belongs within the evangelical community.

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*Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine.* By Gregg R. Allison. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 784 pages. \$44.99.

Over a dozen years ago, Wayne Grudem approached his friend Gregg Allison of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, with a proposition: to write a companion to his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) that would trace the development of each of the doctrines discussed in his book. Allison sets out to present each doctrine diachronically, to incorporate frequent use of direct quotes from primary sources, to refrain from criticizing the historical events, to focus on only the major developments of each doctrine, to limit the development of each doctrine to evangelicalism, and to present the need for greater doctrinal understanding in the church (11-16). This approach provides the parameters to build a concise overview of each doctrine as it develops from its beginnings to present day. Allison's layout matches that of Grudem's *Systematic Theology*: Scripture, God, Humanity, Christ and the Holy Spirit, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.



Not surprisingly, this companion piece to Grudem's decidedly Calvinistic presentation of theology is equally biased toward Reformed theology in its outlook. For example, in his chapter on "Regeneration, Conversion, and Effective Calling" the vast majority of the historical presentation paints everyone as firmly entrenched in the idea that regeneration precedes conversion. When Allison is describing how two camps exist, the regeneration first position is spelled out but the conversion first position is not: "Some believe that regeneration precedes (logically, not temporally) conversion, while others reverse the order" (475). This, combined with the way, when juxtaposed, he always, always, always places "regeneration" before "conversion" suggests to his audience of uninitiated theology readers that this order represents the proper order. Furthermore, almost all of the subjects chosen for his historical survey of this doctrine seem all to be advocates of regeneration first. The exceptions fall into two groups (1) conversion first and (2) it happens all at once. Of the 23 pages, the all-at-once group is afforded about two pages and is represented by John Wesley, whose write up covers about one full page (289-90), and the moderate Calvinist Millard Erickson, graciously is given a half page. If this unbalance of space is not enough, after Allison states Erickson's position that "repentance and faith (the elements

of conversion) are the conditions of regeneration” he asks, “But from where does the ability to repent of sins and believe in Christ come?” (496) as if Erickson’s position is nonsensical. Such Reformed bias, however, should not be unexpected from the companion to Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. Bias, in and of itself, is inevitable in any writing. The key is to recognize it and take it into consideration. Allison’s Reformed bias is not detrimental to the book, but it needs to be recognized and noted.

In the Preface, Allison states that this book “was not written for teachers of historical theology and church history” but to help Christians understand “how the church has come to believe what it believes today” (11). This approach may leave serious students of Christian history frustrated at the superficial treatment of the material covered, but the purpose of the project was not to write the quintessential history of Christian doctrine but to introduce students of systematic theology to the way these doctrines developed into what we have now. The book works well on that level. Allison provides frequent direct quotes from primary sources and focuses on the most pivotal turning points in the history of the doctrine. His readers are given enough background to see that the doctrines were not developed in a vacuum but in response to real problems. Therefore, I believe that *Historical Theology* will help to alleviate much of the fear experienced by college and seminary students who, for whatever reason, remain intimidated by the prospect of studying theology.

I applaud Gregg Allison for taking on such a monumental task as this and for doing it well. But the theologian in me wanted this book to be even broader and more expansive, isn’t that usually the case. The focus of the book’s survey is narrow—North American evangelicals (14–15). Granted, the vastness of the subject matter requires serious restrictions, otherwise the project quickly would get out of control; but when the parameters impact the core, Allison goes beyond cutting away fat and ends up excising meat and bone. For example, in the chapter on the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, he rightly includes the works of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, even though they are not North American evangelicals, but he neglects a third giant of twentieth-century trinitarianism, John Zizioulas. Allison’s self imposed moratorium against eastern Christianity eliminates some pivotal scholarship. Oddly, the contribution of Stanley Grenz, whose work on the Trinity as community was undeniably influenced by Zizioulas’s work of being as communion, was mentioned (250), while Zizioulas himself was not. In special cases like this, where research shows that the doctrinal development is driven by individuals outside of the predetermined groups, Allison should have felt free to follow the evidence. Evangelical scholarship, especially in North America, has been accused of ignoring non-evangelical work. I would have liked Allison’s historical survey to have challenged that accusation. *Historical Theology* would be a much richer and robust survey if Allison has broadened his scope and included the important thinkers outside the evangelical perspective; but, who knows, that probably would have doubled the page count.

*Christopher J. Black, PhD*

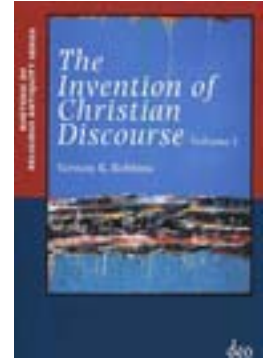
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*The Invention of Christian Discourse*. By Vernon K. Robbins, Vol. 1. Blandford Forum: Deo, 2009. Pp. 517. \$39.95.

Vernon Robbins is Professor of New Testament and Comparative Sacred Texts in the Department and Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University. Beginning with his work in the late 1970's, he has published extensively in the area of New Testament rhetoric, including the twin 1996 works—*The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* and *Exploring the Texture of Texts*—which presented his multi-textural and socio-rhetorical approach. Compared to more traditional rhetorical criticism, Robbins uniquely has moved beyond classical rhetorical categories in order to explore the social, cultural, and ideological aspects of rhetoric through a wide variety of inter-disciplinary methods.



*The Invention of Christian Discourse* is the culmination of three decades of Robbins's research, much of it within the context of scholarly research groups. The current book is the first of two proposed volumes intended to introduce the much larger "Rhetoric of Religious Antiquities" series planned by Deo Publishing. This series will include commentaries that follow the socio-rhetorical method exemplified by Robbins in the current volume and the one to come. The purpose of the current volume is "to provide tools, insights, and strategies for commentators to interpret the New Testament as a creative mode of discourse within first-century Mediterranean society" (4). Moreover, his thesis is that "early Christians expressed what others might have considered to be inexpressible by blending and reconfiguring conventional Mediterranean modes of discourse in new ways" (20).

The first three chapters orient readers to Robbins's main ideas, especially his proposition of rhetorolects (coined from "rhetoric" and "dialect"; also known in some of Robbins's writings simply as "belief systems") within early Christian discourse. Classical rhetorical criticism has broadly located rhetoric in the contexts of court (judicial), assembly (deliberative), and forum/funeral (epideictic). Robbins has argued, though, that Christianity did not develop in these contexts. Instead, rhetorolects emerged from first-century Mediterranean social, cultural, and religious/ideological locations, such as household (wisdom rhetorolect), kingdom (prophetic rhetorolect), empire (apocalyptic and pre-creation rhetorolects), the human body (miracle rhetorolect) and temple (priestly rhetorolect). Key to each of these rhetorolects is the combination of rhetology, which is the argumentative element of the discourse, and rhetography, which is the pictorial element. In any discourse, particular words or phrases evoke pictures from contexts in which people have lived, and these pictures and frames impact how arguments are presented and understood in particular contexts. Perhaps we can simply say that the places we've lived, the experiences we've had, and the way we think about these places and experiences naturally affect the process of communication.

In the present volume, Robbins explored the first three of his six rhetorolects, namely wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic. For each of these, readers must not think of genres, in the traditional sense, but instead focus on how each rhetorolect was persuasive because of the argumentation and picturing inherent in it. Robbins is particularly concerned with how the various rhetorolects blended together within early Christian discourse. For example, authors could have blended wisdom discourse with apocalyptic discourse, or priestly discourse with pre-creation discourse, or any other combination, to create the optimal effect on their audience. This concept of “blending” is at the heart of much of Robbins’s project, because his entire socio-rhetorical approach is based on the philosophy of inter-disciplinary and inter-textual interpretation. This focus becomes especially clear in chapter 10 of *Invention*, in which Robbins carried out a number of “conversations” with scholars from other disciplines and perspectives.

The focus on inter-disciplinary and inter-textual interpretation brings to light two important comments about this book. First, when Robbins interacts with other disciplines, the language often becomes complex, technical, and frankly hard to follow. The book will be most accessible for readers with previous experience in rhetorical criticism, literary criticism, philosophical hermeneutics, or for a “secular” field such as psychology or sociology. Second, rhetorolects, rhetography, and Robbins’s overall socio-rhetorical project reveal some post-modern and post-structural influences. These influences are based on presuppositions, and lead in directions that may rightfully give pause to many readers of this journal. The post-modern nature of Robbins’s project is unmistakable, yet the danger of simply applying a label (i.e. liberal, post-modern, unscientific, etc.) and thereby missing the potentially positive impact of new ideas is particularly acute in this case. New hermeneutical conversations allow further investigation of the nature of God’s communication with people and the ways in which these people communicate and associate with one another. Evangelicals greatly value the formation of communities, the powerful presentation of a persuasive message, and the task of interpreting biblical texts. Though socio-rhetorical interpretation might conceive of the overall hermeneutical project in new or unfamiliar terms, evangelical scholarship can benefit from interaction with rhetorolectic and rhetorographical studies, and such interaction may provide the opportunity for fruitful discussion and important critiques.

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*Director of Financial Aid*  
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# 18,744

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