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Foreword	3
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BECHTEL LECTURES 2005

Mennonites: A Peace Church in Conversation

Fernando Enns

Lecture One

The Peace Church: Dialogue and Diversity in the Ecumenical Movement	4
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Lecture Two

The Peace Church: Identity and Tolerance in Pluralist Societies	19
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Mennonite Graduate Student Conference 2004

Preface

<i>Phil Enns and Jeremy Bergen</i>	32
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Visual Images as Text?

Toward a Mennonite Theology of the Arts <i>Chad Martin</i>	33
---	----

The Lost Cause: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Judeo-Christian Myth of Origin

<i>Christina Reimer</i>	40
-------------------------	----

The Flooded Text: Finding Dry Land in <i>The Wings of the Dove</i> <i>Jacob Jost</i>	50
To What Does the Bible Refer? On Metaphor and Analogy <i>Phil Enns</i>	63
Reading the Moral Law: A Hermeneutical Approach to Religious Moral Epistemology <i>David Kratz Mathies</i>	74
Origen on the Authorial Intention of Scripture <i>Jeremy M. Bergen</i>	85

Book Reviews

Dallas Wiebe, <i>On the Cross: Devotional Poems</i> Reviewed by Paul Tiessen	97
Hans Küng, <i>My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs</i> Reviewed by Thomas Finger	100
David Augsburger, <i>Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate</i> Reviewed by Howard Zehr	102
John Howard Yoder, <i>The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited</i> Reviewed by Dennis Stoutenberg	104
Loren L. Johns, <i>The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John</i> Reviewed by Sheila Klassen-Wiebe	107
Jean Janzen, <i>Piano in the Vineyard</i> ; David Waltner-Toews, <i>The Complete Tante Tina: Mennonite Blues and Recipes.</i> Reviewed by Ervin Beck	109

Foreword

We are pleased to present in this issue the 2005 Bechtel Lectures delivered by Fernando Enns at Conrad Grebel University College, selected papers from the second Mennonite Graduate Student Conference (held at Elkhart, Indiana in 2004), and a wide array of book reviews. Readers of diverse interests and backgrounds cannot help but find something provocative and stimulating among these most varied offerings. After mulling over this issue, be sure to stay with us. We have scheduled many topics to explore, both in omnibus and single theme issues.

About the Bechtel Lectures

The Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies were established in 2000 through the generosity of Lester Bechtel, a devoted churchman actively interested in Mennonite history. Lester Bechtel's dream was to make the academic world of research and study accessible to a broader constituency, and to build bridges of understanding between the school and the church. The Lectures, held annually and open to the public, offer noted scholars and church leaders the opportunity to explore and discuss topics representing the breadth and depth of Mennonite history and identity. Previous lecturers in this distinguished series were Terry Martin, Stanley Hauerwas, Rudy Wiebe, and Nancy Heisey.

About the 2005 Bechtel Lecturer

At the time of delivering the 2005 Bechtel Lectures, Fernando Enns was professor of systematic theology and ecumenical studies at the University of Heidelberg. At present he is establishing an Institute for the study of the theology of the Peace Churches at the University of Hamburg. A pastor in the German Mennonite church, he is vice-chair of the Association of Mennonite Churches in Germany. As a Mennonite delegate to the World Council of Churches, he played a key role in initiating the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-10). Enns's numerous publications include *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation*, co-edited with Scott Holland and Ann K. Riggs (2004), and *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene: Mennonitische Wurzeln einer Ethik der Gewaltfreiheit* [A Peace Church in the Ecumenical Movement: The Mennonite Roots of an Ethic of Nonviolence], (2003).

C. Arnold Snyder, *Academic Editor* Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*

BECHTEL LECTURES 2005

Mennonites: A Peace Church in Conversation

Fernando Enns

LECTURE ONE

The Peace Church: Dialogue and Diversity in the Ecumenical Movement

Plurality and Diversity in Christian Belief

Since the sixteenth century Reformation, all the churches in the Protestant stream, are characterized by plurality. What began as a reform movement within the medieval Roman Catholic church soon became a movement of counter churches when it was confronted with severe resistance. In the end this resulted in a clear separation from that traditional church and led to totally new church structures. And, as is the case in almost all renewal movements, the Protestant Reformation fell into a plurality of opinions, once the common opposition against the ruling force no longer served as a unifying principle. The Reformation era has become a symbol for the challenge of unity within the Christian community.¹

One could say that in the beginning the common denominator among all the reformers – from Luther to Calvin, from Zwingli to Menno – was their joint opposition to Roman Catholicism. They all agreed that the deplorable state of affairs in the church could not be ameliorated unless there was a clear, new, and concentrated reflection on the gospel itself. Therefore, they stressed the principle of *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone. Scripture alone could justify any reform. Scripture should be the ultimate authority, not tradition, not an office, not a hierarchy. This conviction was itself regulated by some other well-known exclusive articles: *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*. Only by Christ, only by grace through faith, are we justified before and by God. It is this common basis that unites the various positions among the reformers. The Anabaptists and later Mennonites never neglected these principles and thus are part of the Protestant family.

However, the principle of *sola scriptura* did not itself guarantee unity among the Reformation's different groups. On the contrary, that principle became the origin and reason for a vast plurality. As diverse and manifold as the texts of the Old and New Testament are, so diverse became the divergent positions within the Reformation. There was disagreement on baptism, the interpretation of the Lord's Supper, the right relation of church and state, the right way of proclamation, the meaning of discipleship, and many more issues. Naturally all the reformers tried to prove by Scripture that their own position was "biblical" and therefore true. And they all claimed the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only valid source of revelation.

Here it became more obvious than ever that the Bible does not consist of one book but is a whole library and plurality of witnesses to one truth. Consequently, various interpretations of the different theological topics were developed legitimately on the basis of the regulative principles² of the Reformation. It also became clear that in most cases several interpretations for conducting a Christian life or for shaping the Christian church were deducible from one single witness in Scripture. Scripture itself allows and calls for different interpretations, it seems.

The question then arises, Is this an obstacle for the church community? Is this precisely what the Roman Catholic church had warned so urgently against, and still does warn against? As faithful Protestants, we need to ask what the Bible itself tells us about plurality and diversity.

Plurality and Diversity in the Bible

When we deal with diversity, we shall not reduce our observations to hermeneutical questions, but instead start where the reformers started: with the content of the Bible and the biblical stories. When taking a closer look at the texts, we realize a plurality of opinions are manifested in Scripture. The early Christians were far from united in their interpretations of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In general, we want to ask if it will ever be possible to come to an unmistakable unity within the church, if the church's very being is grounded in a revelation that testifies to a truth always beyond space and time, always more than all our imaginations, and always beyond our capability to express it fully in language.

Think of the discussions the disciples had, e.g., the Apostles' council in Acts 15, where Peter and Paul had different opinions about the mission of the

church. During this dialogue at the council of Jerusalem, they did not convince each other fully, yet they still came to some agreement. Both interpretations were accepted in their validity and without giving up the unity of the church. The gospel in Jerusalem is proclaimed in a different way than in the Hellenistic world – within the one church. The unity is clearly demonstrated by the common collection for the congregation in Jerusalem. One is inclined to think the first contextual theologies within Christianity started here, at the church's very beginning.

Is unity one of the primary commandments for Christians? The council at Jerusalem indicates that unity within the ecclesia seems necessary but is obviously not understood as uniformity. We don't see how Paul is convinced by Peter or vice versa. No one submits to the opinion of the other. It does not appear that one of them can claim the absolutely true interpretation of the revelation over against the other. Rather, we see a wisdom among the Apostles that is far more differentiated. Unity among the early Christians is preserved without submission or the necessity for either side to give up their argument, because both interpretations are legitimately grounded in the gospel message of Jesus itself. Diversity within this unity is obviously not a problem.

We see the same wisdom in the process of building the canon of Scripture. It was possible to include three different gospels plus John, and to have divergent letters from Paul and the others, and so on. Diversity is clearly promoted as a possibility within unity.

Let us take a closer look now at some concrete statements about plurality. I will do this by using an illustration from my own context at the University of Heidelberg in Germany. In the Ecumenical Institute and Student Hall, where I live and teach, there is a nice chapel where we worship as an ecumenical community, students from Orthodox, Roman Catholic and different Protestant denominations, coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, plus a Muslim from Senegal and one from Iraq. The chapel is a simple room, but it has two stained glass windows on opposite sides. On the west side you find an image of the Tower of Babel, on the east side you can see an illustration of Pentecost. These biblical stories were chosen deliberately. What do they tell us about diversity and the formation of an ecumenical community?

The window on the west side symbolizes the Tower that is being erected for one sole purpose: "Let us make a name for ourselves." How? "(And the

Lord said:) Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6). The offence against the will of God was to collect power by creating uniformity. In Germany this reminds us of the darkest times of the Nazi regime, when all parts of society were brought into one ideological line (*Gleichschaltung*): one people, one nation, one Führer.

[Slide of west side chapel window was shown here.]

In order to stop the “uniformers,” God confused their language and “scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth. . . .” In the earliest beginning there was a multitude of plurality; in creation plurality is the original state, not uniformity. Uniformity is artificial, man-made. It is not according to the will of God. Diversity is. The other window on the east side tells the Pentecost story of Acts 2. It is composed as a counter story to Babel. As the people gathered, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The effect was that “they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability.” The crowd was “bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.” What follows is a long list of different nationalities who “hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” in their own languages.

[Slide of east side chapel window was shown here.]

What does this tell us about diversity and unity? On the one hand, the Spirit does not destroy the diversity of languages or the plurality. On the other, the Spirit enables the people to understand each other, to communicate, to dialogue within this diversity. We celebrate this fact as the birth of the church: among the many nations with all different languages, cultural backgrounds, and mentalities, the Spirit makes it possible to dialogue. The goal in this gathering of the church is not to gain power by uniforming, but to testify to “God’s deeds of power.” Wherever God – the God of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, the Father of Jesus Christ, born by Mary, the giver of the Holy Spirit – is worshipped and glorified, the Spirit creates a community of dialogue and understanding, a hermeneutical community, a diverse community of mutuality. It is not one single person who finds the right words; everyone in his or her

native language is able to listen and witness to this truth, the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the miracle performed by the Holy Spirit.

For me this is the most wonderful illustration of ecumenism. The different denominations and church traditions hear each other in their own (native) denominational language containing special beliefs and different characters, yet they understand each other. Why? Because their common goal is doxology, the glorification of the triune God and his deeds of power, as at Pentecost. The Spirit then creates a new community, for which diversity seems to be one of the preconditions.

Unio or Communio?

This image of unity in diversity is also found in Jesus' high-priestly prayer for his disciples in John 17 (a classic text for the modern ecumenical movement): "that they all may be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent us." Father and Son are one but they are different, differentiated persons of the one Trinity.³ Only in relation to each other do they become who they are: the Father is the Father of the Son Jesus Christ, the Son is the Son of the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Israel, the God of the promises. The persons are different, and have to be different, because only in their diversity can they relate to each other and be for each other what they truly are. Again, to be one does not simply mean to be identical, but to be in relation with each other, in a community that does not neutralize diversity.⁴

We hear Jesus praying that this unity in diversity should also be true of his followers. He does not pray this for either their sake or his own, but for the sake of credibility: "so that the world may believe." In his prayer, Jesus makes the trinitarian community the model for the community of believers. Therefore it has also become the model for the community of churches in ecumenism. In this way the community of churches itself becomes a witness to the community of the Trinity. This implies that we, the church, will bear a credible witness in the world when we accept each other's participating in the one community, a community that respects diversity. In Latin this is called *communio* over against *unio*.⁵

More images of interpreting community in diversity can be found in the New Testament. The most vivid image is probably in 1 Cor. 12, where Paul

describes the one body with various parts and the one Spirit who produces many gifts (cf. also Rom. 12).

From all this we can now summarize. Plurality or diversity is not only a historical phenomenon within the church since the Reformation era, or only a concept arising from various interpretations of Scripture. It is also based in genuine theological reasoning. If this is so, then all our reflections on diversity within the one Christian community of churches must now concentrate on the quality of the relations among the members.

Mennonites and Ecumenism

The model of unity in diversity outlined above is exactly the ecclesiological model that the WCC has followed since its beginning. Yet the role of Mennonites in the modern ecumenical movement can only be described in a wide range that is as diverse as Mennonites themselves are. This is somewhat surprising, since in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition the community approach to ecclesiology has always been the predominant model, although not always reflected in theological terms.

Mennonites have given important impulses to the ecumenical movement, helping to shape it as well as skeptical observers who preferred to stand aside. At the same time the ecumenical movement has always challenged Mennonites to explain their “native language” of theology and ethics, and to make these insights available to the wider community of churches. Large portions of explicit Mennonite theology would not have been produced if it weren’t for this ecumenical challenge, since Mennonites have tended to concentrate more on their congregational life in their local community. It is fair to say that if not for these ecumenical encounters and dialogues, a lot of twentieth-century Mennonite theological reflection would simply not exist.

So, these encounters have had at least a twofold effect. They have contributed to others’ knowledge about theological interpretations of the gospel from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective; and they have contributed immensely to our self-assurance about who we are as a Mennonite community of believers, why we are different from others (or at least how we ourselves think Mennonites should be). Through ecumenical encounter and dialogue our genuine denominational identity and profile has not been relativized but sharpened.⁶

In what follows I will give a few examples of Mennonite ecumenical engagement that illustrate this thesis. In order not to sound too optimistic or one-sided, we should keep in mind that big segments of Mennonites have rejected the challenge of ecumenical dialogue and of becoming part of this community in diversity. The reasons are manifold: a fear of becoming monopolized by mainstream churches; a concern to have to follow the agenda of others; a general skepticism toward any kind of institutionalized forms of church communions, or the preservation of the memory that Mennonites are a small minority persecuted by other Christian denominations. By no means should we underestimate these concerns, and it is important to keep this story alive since it shows past attempts at unification that closely followed the Tower of Babel model.⁷

The Beginning of the Ecumenical Movement

The challenge starts with the attempt to classify Mennonites in the denominational families of Christian traditions. In opposition to Orthodox Churches we belong to the western stream of church history; in opposition to the Roman Catholic stream we belong to the churches of the Reformation; in opposition to all state churches (including Lutheran and Reformed) we belong to the category of free churches. If we say that adult baptism is the main criterion for differentiation, then – together with the Baptists – we would be part of the Believers Church tradition. If we choose the nonviolent stance as our key identity marker, we find ourselves together with some other historic peace churches such as the Friends (Quakers) and the Church of the Brethren. The challenging question comes back to us: Who are we? What is most important and identity-shaping to us?

Members of the Free Church traditions were instrumental in building the early ecumenical structures. The Evangelical Alliance (1846) and the World Student Christian Federation (1895) are two examples. In the founding of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, the Believers Church influence can be traced. The peace conferences in Den Haag (1899 and 1907) asked the Quaker J. Allen Baker to foster friendly relations between the churches in England and in Germany, out of which connection grew the foundation of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the churches (1914). In the same

year, Henry Hodkin, a Quaker, and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, a pacifist Lutheran from Germany, started preparations to inaugurate an International Fellowship of Reconciliation (1919).

The strongest motivation for the ecumenical movement arose from the mission experience. To some church leaders it just didn't make sense to export the sixteenth-century church divisions of Europe into Africa, Latin America, or Asia. The second strong motivation came from the terrible experience of World War I. Where were the churches in this orgy of killing? Where was the Christian voice? When the Second World War started, the call became even more urgent: Where is a joint word of the churches that the world cannot ignore?⁸

The Founding of the World Council of Churches, 1948

In 1948 the World Council of Churches was founded in Amsterdam. Its basis was formulated then and is still valid today: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches, which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior *according to the scriptures* and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling *to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*"⁹ (The amendments in italics were added in 1961, when some Orthodox Churches joined the WCC.) Among the founding members were the Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit (Association of Mennonites in the Netherlands) and the Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden (Union of German Mennonite congregations).¹⁰ In the list of delegates was John David Unruh (USA), representing the Mennonite Central Committee.

After the Second World War, the churches of the WCC jointly condemned the war as an act against the will of God and also confessed their failure.¹¹ There was a growing openness to the Mennonite peace witness as well as that of other peace churches. Other components of the Mennonite identity were neglected, partly because Mennonites expressed themselves most strongly in the field of peace ethics and peace theology, and less so in the ecumenical discussions of other topics.

In 1949 the General Secretary of the WCC, Willem A. Visser't Hooft, officially asked the historic peace churches and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation to explain their pacifist position to the ecumenical community. The answer was presented in 1951 with the declaration, War is Contrary to

the Will of God.¹² This declaration contained no less than four separate statements of the four participating groups, something that led to a divided reaction on the WCC side. How could the WCC formulate an unambiguous declaration, if even the peace churches couldn't come up with a joint statement? A second response was prepared: "This conference recognizes that the challenge (to produce a unified statement) of the World Council of Churches is an opportunity which should not be lost. . ." (Netherlands 1952). This resulted in the 1953 document, *Peace is the Will of God*.¹³

I relate these details to illustrate how the challenge of the ecumenical community brought the historic peace churches to a common, precise, and theologically grounded statement. Without this challenge, Mennonites would probably not have been looking for such an opportunity – at least European Mennonites would have failed to do so. The common declaration of 1953 tried to refute the general reproaches against pacifism. It takes up the relevant sentence of the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam and gives christological reasons for it: "War is incompatible with the teaching and example of Christ." It also adopts the ecclesiologically founded formulation of the previous ecumenical Oxford Conference on Life and Work (1937),¹⁴ wherein the churches had proclaimed the condemnation of war unconditionally and unrestrictedly, since the *una sancta*, the one and holy community of churches, transcends any social separation in the world. It was affirmed that belonging to the worldwide body of Christ is stronger than any commitment to a nation state or ethnic group. The declaration of the historic peace churches explains that these are exactly the arguments against warfare.

Of course, underlying differences became visible in how the minority churches argued from their perspective. They defined themselves in opposition to "the world" yet possessed a self-understanding as a church that is aware of its responsibility in the world and tries to fulfil it by giving a living example of discipleship. Mennonites opposed those mainline churches that did not give up the medieval model of the *corpus christianum* (the unity of Empire and Church) and that therefore did not really renounce the just war theory. In doubtful cases, they claimed, for Christians there can't be a decision about the lesser of two evils. In those cases readiness to suffer would be the true church's unequivocal witness. By this, Mennonites made their distinct emphasis clear as part of the larger body of Christ, the community of churches.

Puidoux Conferences, 1955-73

A series of joint consultations followed, called the Puidoux Conferences, named after the town where the first meeting took place.¹⁵ These dialogues are the first attempts to take up a conversation between the churches of the “left wing” of the Reformation and the “territory churches,” a conversation impossible for centuries due to persecution and condemnations on both sides. The initiative arose from a meeting of representatives from the historic peace churches and from the WCC staff in Geneva (including the later General Secretary, Philip Potter).

There have been four major meetings: Puidoux, Czechoslovakia (1955); Iserlohn, Germany (1957); Bièvres, France (1960), Oud Poulgeest, Netherlands (1962). The topics tell us about what was at stake. The overall theme, “The Lordship of Christ over Church and State,” marks one of the crucial questions in these debates. If Christ is Lord, he is Lord over Church and State. For Mennonites, this implied that the church’s first duty is to confess this fact and to live in discipleship. That is the mission of the church in and to the world. It means that the church will not assume power to wage war, since Christ is Lord, not the church. For the opposite side, this confession of the Lordship of Christ led to the basic conclusion that there is no power that is not granted by this Lord. Christ rules the world through worldly institutions, which might in the end include the possibility of waging war in order to defend the innocent and to fight the evildoers.

Especially in Germany these conferences had a remarkable impact on discussions of peace ethics. It was people from the confessing church that had resisted the Nazi regime who were so interested and involved (e.g., Martin Niemöller, Ernst Wolf, and others) and who later became leading figures in a nationwide peace movement, long before the German Mennonites gained recognition in society. On the Mennonite side John Howard Yoder is probably the best known representative. At the first Puidoux meeting, he was still a doctoral student in Basel. My guess is that Yoder wouldn’t have developed his representative theology from a Mennonite perspective without these early years in ecumenical formation.

The presentations made during these conferences are worth reading, since many of the arguments are still valid for current debates in peace ethics. It became clear that the lasting differences follow from different understandings of what the church is, the ecclesiologies. Is it a state church,

a parallel institution to the government, sharing in political power? Or is it an alternative community model that seeks to provide an example of what it means to live according to the kingdom of God? If the first model seems far too worldly, the second is probably far too idealistic. This is a common ecumenical insight from a later perspective.

Today we are more realistic on both sides. Without having lost the idealistic vision of a kingdom theology, we reflect together on the nature and the purpose of the church.¹⁶ Maybe this will lead us closer to each other in our reflections on war, peace, and justice.¹⁷ But the Historic Peace Churches have without a doubt been very influential on other churches in the ecumenical family and on the WCC's general policy, because there were Mennonites ready to share, testify, and struggle with other traditions, and to get involved in the tough questions.

The Assemblies

In the history of WCC Assemblies we can also trace the voice of Mennonites. The third Assembly in New Delhi 1961 explicitly asked for consultations between pacifist and non-pacifist traditions. One of the most important and influential conferences was the 1966 conference on Church and Society. Many see this event as a direct link to the Puidoux Conferences. Together with churches from the South, communities like the Mennonites argued at the fourth Assembly in Uppsala (1968) that "orthopraxis" for the fellowship of churches is at least as important as orthodoxy. A study on nonviolent methods was initiated in which the peace churches participated enthusiastically.¹⁸ In Nairobi (1975) the Program to Combat Militarism was initiated. Vancouver (1983) marks the start of the Conciliar Process on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation,¹⁹ which reached its climax in the Seoul world convocation (1990).

The Lima Process on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1980-92)

So far almost all of the contributions from Mennonites were limited to peace ethics, representing the Christian pacifist tradition. In the Lima Process on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry we finally see theological statements on other issues, imbedded in an ecclesiology from a distinct Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. Since the German and the Dutch Mennonites are full member churches of the WCC, they were asked to present official responses to the ecumenical declarations on baptism, eucharist, and ministry.²⁰

Baptism, Mennonites explained, is understood as a confession to visible discipleship (*Nachfolge*). It is the potential of the individual to react to God's primary grace. In the context of the community of believers this leads to a mutual responsibility. The Eucharist – the Lord's Supper – is a joint confession of Jesus Christ, the one who invites us to this table. Therefore, the Lord's Supper has a power to transcend limits and borderlines, and enlarges the community of believers to the worldwide Church. The Mennonite understanding of ministry does not include a representation of Christ, but is more concerned about the participation of the whole community, a consequence of the priesthood of all believers. Different charismata allow for different performances in ministry, which must never result in the building of hierarchies. For Mennonites the apostolicity of the church does not depend on the uninterrupted succession of ministries. Apostolicity is not described in terms of ministry. The continuity of the church, its apostolicity, is granted by the message of the gospel itself.

The experience of the local church is the primary context for these statements, in contrast to some other church traditions. This might be one reason dogmatics and ethics seem to be so closely knit together in Mennonite reasoning. In the Lima Responses the WCC's Mennonite member churches confirmed their commitment to the ecumenical community, and on that basis formulated critical questions about some institutional forms of ecumenism.

Again, we can observe how the ecumenical community presents a motivation to reflect carefully and theologically on what we believe and how we argue from a distinct Mennonite perspective. Therefore, these statements not only become a contribution to the wider church but help reassure ourselves about our own identity. This is especially crucial for a tradition like ours, which does not know any authoritative teachings besides Scripture alone, has a very loose relation to written confessions, and is less concerned about dogmatic traditions. It is thus crucial to be engaged in ecumenical dialogue in order to have a permanent regulator at hand, the ecumenical community of all believers. The WCC's Mennonite member churches take care that the wisdom of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition – our story, our perspective, our interpretation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is heard and shared in the ecumenical family of churches. In doing so we help ensure that this story is not lost in the wisdom of the worldwide body of Christ.

The Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-10

The most recent development in this history of Mennonite involvement in the WCC is the initiation of a “Decade to Overcome Violence. Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010.” It was adopted by the seventh WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998, after the German Mennonites had initiated a move to begin the twenty-first century among the ecumenical fellowship of churches in this manner. It is an attempt to move closer to a fellowship of peace churches, to fulfil our ministry of reconciliation as churches in order to uncover the complicity of the churches and our theologies in violence, and to move peace theology and peace building from the periphery to the center of the life of the churches.²¹

The Decade has become a benchmark for future programmatic work within the WCC. It is encouraging to see churches around the world getting engaged in peace work and beginning to reflect their theologies from that perspective – churches for which it is new to think of nonviolence as a key identity marker of the nature of the church. And again, as in the WCC’s early years, the Central Committee has asked the Peace Churches to take the lead and contribute to the search for nonviolent ways to overcome violence, since it is such a threat to many Christians and non-Christians around the world. The Historic Peace Churches have not only participated individually in regional and international efforts of the Decade, but have started a new reflection process among themselves to determine what shape a contemporary peace theology and peace church should have. This started in 2001 in Europe (Bienenberg)²² and continued in 2004 in Africa (Nairobi)²³; plans are underway for 2007 in Asia (Indonesia).

Mennonites in the WCC have a prophetic ministry, as other traditions bring in their special wisdom and interpretation, their stories. We remind each other of the richness within the church, because we believe that our insights belong not just to ourselves but are gifts to be shared with all. Mennonites generally still tend to limit their ecumenical involvement to the local context. But we have seen several bilateral dialogues at the international level, most recently with the Roman Catholic Church and now starting with the Lutheran World Federation. We are happy to see that the Mennonite Community in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has, in the meantime, become a full member of the WCC, a development that has led to fruitful collaborations as an African Mennonite identity is brought into the community.

The Peace Church is Ecumenical

For some Mennonites, the WCC has been a controversial instrument. Many evangelicals criticized the WCC for being too political, or they accused other member churches of not being real Christians. I have never really understood why some Mennonite groups are adopting this criticism. If we call ourselves a church of believers, if we emphasize ethics, lifestyle, and discipleship so much, and if we consider ourselves a peace church, Mennonites should be in the front row of the ecumenical movement. Let me explore this briefly.

During the Decade to Overcome Violence we are learning about the many different forms of violence. It seems that a broad understanding of violence is necessary in order to grasp its reality. My own definition has been shaped through many discussions in this international arena. Violence is a physical or psychical act of denial, injury, or destruction of (a) the personhood of another person, his will, his integrity and dignity – his likeness in the image of God; and (b) right relations – of God's relation to humankind through creation, reconciliation, and perfection, through which right relations between persons is made possible. Such a definition shows that we need to understand violence more broadly than simply as physical offences or killing. Violence is first and foremost a term of relation. Every attempt to exercise power unilaterally is violence. In order to overcome it, the establishing, sustaining, and assuring of right relations is key to the peace church witness.

Therefore, it is not enough to be against war or to be non-resistant. Being a peace church includes longing for, and engaging in, the building of right relations with the other in order to minimize – maybe even overcome – violence. This is what the story of Jesus is all about. This is what *Nachfolge*, discipleship, means. “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent us”: we come back to John 17 and right relations. A trinitarian foundation of the peace church ecclesiology is helpful in order to argue more fully, wholistically, and coherently in favor of a church that is a model for right relations, a messianic community without discrimination as to gender, race, age, or other categories.

This means that if we are participating in the trinitarian relation, then the boundaries of the peace church cannot be drawn around either the local congregation or the Mennonite family. Today the peace church cannot live in the ghetto. It is ecumenical or it is not a peace church! Ecumenism is about building and sustaining right relations – nothing more, nothing less – so that

the world may believe. If our mission is to be credible, we need to live this unity in diversity. Active partaking in the ecumenical *communio* of churches is key to this witness.

I invite you, Mennonites in Canada and North America, to consider joining us German, Dutch, and Congolese Mennonites in the responsibility of sharing, witnessing, and arguing from a distinctively Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective – the perspective of our story – within the larger community of churches. They deserve it, and we need it!

Notes

¹ There had been numerous other schisms before in the history of the church, but the Reformation marks the most severe one within Western tradition.

² I use this term in the sense George A. Lindbeck proposes in *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

³ Among the many recent publications on trinitarian theology, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997 [1990]).

⁴ None of the Anabaptists denied the confession of the triune God.

⁵ This is developed in more detail in Fernando Enns, *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003). English translation in preparation.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ For illustration, see John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Good Books, 1990).

⁸ Cf. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, 3 vol. (Geneva: WCC, 2004).

⁹ Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Basis: Its History and Significance" in *EcRev* 37 (1985).

¹⁰ The list of official delegates includes the Mennonites Dr. Willem Frederik Goldermann from the Netherlands and Dr. Wilhelm Ernst Crous from Germany.

¹¹ Cf. *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 1948, ed. W.A. Visser 't Hooft (SCM Press, 1949).

¹² Cf. Donald F. Durnbaugh (ed.), *On Earth Peace, Discussions on War / Peace Issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches 1935-1975* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1978).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Churches Survey their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community, and State* (London, 1937).

¹⁵ Cf. Durnbaugh, *On Earth Peace*.

¹⁶ Cf. *The Nature and the Purpose of the Church*. Faith and Order Paper 181 (Geneva: WCC, 1998).

¹⁷ See also the study process on Ecclesiology and Ethics. *Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (eds.) (Geneva: WCC, 1997).

¹⁸ Cardiff, Wales (1972).

¹⁹ Richard J. Burkholder, *Mennonites in Ecumenical Dialogue on Peace and Justice*. Mennonite Central Committee, Occasional Papers No.7, 1988.

²⁰ United German Mennonite Congregations, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI, Faith and Order Paper 144 (Geneva: WCC, 1988), 123-29.

²¹ Cf. www.wcc-coe.org/dov.

²² Cf. Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, Ann K. Riggs (eds.), *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2004).

²³ A documentary DVD and book are in preparation.

LECTURE TWO

The Peace Church: Identity and Tolerance in Pluralist Societies

The Context

Pluralist Societies Demand Tolerance

Plurality shapes the character of our postmodern times more than anything else. Pluralism determines all aspects of our societal life; it also plays into our church activities, in formulating beliefs, in theological reflection. It is not my purpose here to provide a full analysis of this fact, but to limit myself to some general remarks concerning our pluralist society before speaking to the more specific challenges of identity and tolerance in this era.

In former times, when people lived in agrarian societies, every aspect of life was somehow connected. I remember this from my childhood in a Mennonite colony in Brazil: the people on the streets were the same people I knew in school, in the one single supermarket, in the municipality, and on Sundays in church (there were of course two different Mennonite churches in the colony!). It was one homogeneous society. Today I live in a highly industrialized society in Germany, where the fragmentation of life has grown enormously. The people I work with are not those I live with in my neighborhood, and those I worship with on Sundays are again a different group. I sing in a choir with

people that I meet only there; my family does not know most of my friends, and so on. The world falls into numerous pieces, several small worlds.

This means that I live with people who do not share the same or similar values. Sometimes we don't even share the same religious beliefs, since many people have a different faith or do not belong to a religious community at all. In Germany we have a growing Muslim population. And in general we see a breaking-away from tradition all over. Belonging to a group or a community is based upon free choice, and sometimes undertaken only for a certain period.¹

We might regret this development and speak of the "good old times" when life was far less complicated. But we should also bear in mind that this differentiation and separation of all the aspects of life are a result of a prolonged development that began with the Reformation era. The freedom to choose your own confession was only possible after a hard struggle, for which many martyrs paid with their lives. This was one first step to plurality. In addition, the Enlightenment moved the identity-building and identity-preserving part of religion into the realm of the private, and an ideologically and religiously neutral state came into being. The common ultimate point of reference, which could provide the basis for a consensus on definite rules to sustain public order, is no longer one religion or a monarchy, but reason.²

As a result, all post-secular and postmodern societies are determined by a plurality of confessions and religions. Separation of church and state, as well as freedom of religion, have become pillars of these societies. And we recall that both of these principles had been demands by minorities, including the early Anabaptists. In fact, I would argue that these two principles are intrinsic to the nature and witness of the peace church up to today.

Dangers and Challenges within Pluralist Societies

Thus we Mennonites, the descendants of those Anabaptist demands, could be most satisfied with these societal developments. But my observation is that most Mennonites – together with the majority of Christians – are worried and feel more insecure because of the severe dangers they are now confronted with. In the religiously and ideologically neutral state we are left with so-called "patchwork identities," cocktails of identities that are a result of the free choice of what to belong to. Identities seem to become relative. At the same time the moral demand for tolerance itself becomes absolute, but it

lacks a sufficient rationale since it is no longer grounded in a clear identity – as in the time of the Anabaptists.

There is a second danger. It has been with us since our modern and postmodern societies have turned into multi-cultural societies. In Canada this might not seem to be such an unusual reality, because you have always dealt with this fact, but it is different in Europe. Since September 11, 2001, when Arab terrorists killed thousands by crashing into the World Trade Center in New York City, we are observing a growing nervousness within our pluralist societies. We realize that we have not yet become multi-religious and multi-cultural societies in actual fact, but merely societies where parallel societies exist side by side.³

In German cities you will find neighborhoods where only Turkish people live. The shops, the people on the streets, the travel agency, and nowadays also in the newly built mosques and on TV channels – all you hear is the Turkish language. These people do not blend into the German population and many of them don't want to. There is no need to learn German in order to survive.

Since September 11, since the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq that have taken thousands of lives and continue to do so, and since politicians in our Western societies make politics on the basis of fear and insecurity, people have become somewhat hysterical when confronted with strangers. At best they have become more cautious. A growing number of voices now claim that the multi-cultural society was just a nice but unrealistic dream and that more important for modern democratic societies is the challenge to defend themselves. This results in yet another danger that coincides with the first one of multiple identities: in the Arab world as well as in conservative Christian circles, intolerant fundamentalism has become a counter reaction to the manifold threat to one's own identity. There is a deep longing for clarity in orientation, a worldview that provides distinguishable categories of good and bad.

Since this fundamentalism leads to a readiness both to support violence and to a tendency toward uniformity in one's own community, expelling and discriminating the ones who are different, the whole situation we are facing becomes a strong challenge for the being and witness of the peace church.

THESIS 1 *The peace church needs to clarify its demand for tolerance on the grounds of a clear identity, if it does not want to support blind fundamentalists on one hand or pure relativism on the other. Both ways*

are contrary to the very nature of the peace church, since neither fundamentalism nor relativism is in line with the gospel message of reconciliation.

In the following I will try to clarify identity and tolerance and the relation between the two, in order to avoid the simplistic slogans about “clashes” of different traditions, cultures, and religions within pluralist societies.

The Ecumenical “Decade to Overcome Violence” as a Response

When we initiated the “Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010” in the World Council of Churches as an effort to react to the ruling culture of violence (before 9/11), we identified four major themes that seem to play a key role in the task of overcoming violence. One of these themes is the quest for identity.⁴ Whenever identities are in danger or seem to be threatened, a culture of violence is supported. This could be illustrated by the war in former Yugoslavia, in the daily news reports of violent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, or the civil war battles in Indonesia or Northern Ireland. In our democratic societies in Western Europe we see violent attacks toward foreigners and strangers almost every day, even if the newspapers no longer report on every incident. These are illustrations of threatened identities.

Even the now globally operating terrorism could be interpreted – to an extent – on the background of this insight: Identities that are threatened or oppressed over time will eventually find an outlet in violence. This is meant neither as an excuse nor as a sufficient explanation for terror attacks, which provide no solution to problems whatsoever but only support the vicious circles of violence. It is merely an observation. Ongoing humiliation on the basis of the denial of identity grows frustration, which leads to the temptation of taking shelter in any kind of fundamentalism. And fundamentalism in the end will always legitimize violence.

Positive examples reveal the relationship of identity and overcoming violence even more clearly. Why is it that in some societies diverse identities can live – not only alongside but with each other in one community without becoming aggressively discriminating or violent? Consider the European Union in general or Canada, communities in which historic identities are secured

and strengthened. The respect of a given identity and its history, the right to live out this identity, holds a potential for overcoming violence because tolerance toward the otherness is being exercised by all. Being different is not seen as a burden but as something enriching. Loss of diversity and neglect of differences would be a loss for the whole society or community.

THESIS 2 *The assurance of identity supports the overcoming of violence, since it liberates from humiliation and leads towards acceptance of the other.*

Should we call this tolerance? That would be too simple. Reality is more complex. The pure liberal demand for tolerance cannot provide the ground for a peaceful society any longer, if the rationale for tolerance is simply the freedom of the individual. This is the lesson we are now learning. If the demand for tolerance is not rooted in definite identities, it won't have any persuasive power in the long run. If the counter reaction to a loss of orientation and identity is fundamentalism, defined by intolerance, then how can real tolerance be sustainably promoted in such a context?

What is Tolerance?

We need to come back to this basic question, since the pure moral appeal for more tolerance has become so general that the very word "tolerance" is almost lost to triviality. In the true sense of the word, tolerance is an "impossible virtue," says Bernard Williams.⁵ Tolerance asks us to bear (endure) an action or conviction that is not only strange to us but incompatible with our own convictions.

In our daily life there is much that seems strange to us, but often this neither bothers us nor even irritates us. Either it does not really affect us or it is compatible with our own convictions – even if it is strange. Here we are not confronted with the challenge of tolerance. Let me use an example discussed widely in European countries. In some faith communities the believers, mainly women, are asked to cover their heads. Some Muslim communities make this an absolute rule for Muslim women. For years this was not an issue in Germany, since it did not affect non-Muslims at all; we are used to women wearing a scarf on the street, shopping or taking children to school. Even in our schools we are used to the fact that a lot of girls wear

scarves. It is “their business,” we have said. So it was not really an issue of tolerance, since our own identity was not in question, but simply a matter of accepting religious freedom.

However, the question of tolerance did become a hot issue when the first Muslim teacher wearing a scarf was to be sworn into her position (giving her the rank of a civil servant). This meant that a teacher who wants to wear her scarf on the basis of her own beliefs, and maybe even as an expression of certain political convictions, would educate my child. It is a demonstration that will affect my child. In this case we are indeed challenged with the question of tolerance. Can we accept this display? Can we bear it? The reasons for wearing a scarf are not acceptable for us at all. How can we tolerate this development? Should we tolerate it?

Numerous other examples could be found, arising not only between different faith communities but between different Christian traditions of the oikoumene, maybe even among different Mennonite traditions.

THESIS 3 *The challenge of tolerance arises only in situations in which a strange conviction or action is unacceptable to me because its reasoning is not accessible to me. If this strange conviction or action is to be tolerated, the reason for this tolerance needs to be drawn from my own identity.*

The Dialectical Relation of Identity and Tolerance

From these observations we might gain a clearer definition of tolerance and its relation to identity. If you are sure about your own identity, you will be able to judge what is acceptable, what is tolerable, and what is to be rejected. Only if this judgment is based on our own identity will we be able to tolerate the otherness of the other. With an uncertain identity, tolerance is hardly possible. On the one hand, it will lead to a general relativism – indifference towards the other, the stranger – that lacks any respect for the otherness of the other. Through indifference we are losing the capability to reason and argue. This is also why the demand for a higher degree of secularization, as we see in France, does not necessarily lead to a higher degree of tolerance. Secularization does not provide more certain identities, since the secular state can only demand tolerance. But this quest can become itself a fundamentalist demand and won’t help us much, if it is not grounded and argued for from a distinctive, coherent belief system.

On the other hand, the lack of identity can lead to a hasty rejection of everything strange or foreign, since this otherness is interpreted as an additional threat to one's own confusion. Subsequently, indifference toward the otherness is the result; it is simply not understood.

Recently the National Council of Churches in Germany, of which the Mennonites are a member, has adopted a new program together with the Jewish community and some Muslim organizations. "Do you know who I am?" is its title and indicates its goal. Very often we don't even know who the others are. And we cannot simply assume that they know who we are. Here we are trying to take up the challenge of indifference, enabling our congregations and the other communities to get to know one another.

THESIS 4 *Real tolerance does not require weakening, but rather strengthening, the respective identities. The relation of identity and tolerance is to be described in dialectical terms.*

Arguing for Tolerance from a Christian Perspective

Religion is one of the strongest powers in identity building. Even philosophers like Jürgen Habermas admit this nowadays, after claiming for a long time that religion does not really play a role.⁶ Religion aims at the whole person and determines the person to a full extent. It identifies the person as part of a community and instructs persons about their place in that community. Even more, religion informs us about the whole tradition, a story, a stream of stories of which we are part. It informs us through beliefs and rites about ourselves and our vocation. Thus we find ourselves belonging to a certain group or community, we realize our being in relation, and we no longer perceive ourselves as isolated individuals.⁷ From this identification we draw our ethical orientation – especially toward strange and unknown identities.

This role of religion remains true even in postmodern times of fragmented identity and the breaking-up of traditions. Religious identity does not replace other parts of our identity such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, or family. Moreover, religion is capable of integrating these parts of our identity, because religious identity transcends all of them and interprets them.

If tolerance – this impossible virtue – as well as the limits for tolerance can only be justified on the grounds of our own identity, then we need to know how tolerance is justified by our Christian faith, in our case as a peace church.

Is it possible to justify theologically the demand for toleration, to bear a conviction or an action that is strange to my Christian belief?

To answer this question, let me make two distinctions. The first is the general question of truth. Religion is always concerned about the truth. The confession of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior claims to confess a truth about God that is revealed through Jesus Christ and testified to in the witness of the Old and New Testaments. This gospel message is the creator and sustainer of faith. Therefore, faith is not a work of humankind. It is not bound to people, actions, or localities, but is founded exclusively in the experience that God has revealed and has been created by the work of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium internum*). Faith is thus not at our disposal (*unverfügbar*), as God godself is not at our disposal. God is the truth, not religion.

This *Unverfügbarkeit* (not being at our disposal) was the theological motivation for some Anabaptists to claim freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. It has led some Anabaptists to reject church hierarchies, as there can be no ultimate authority over faith but God alone as testified to in Scripture. No human being should presume to dictate a specific belief to others. In light of the truth of God, every historical, worldly manifestation of religion must be relativized if we agree that the ultimate truth is subject to God alone.

If we are convinced about this truth, should it not also apply to the religion of others? Should it not be valid for their confessions? Their belief is – like ours – not at their own disposal and thus becomes subject to toleration. We have to accept this fact. Otherwise, we would identify our religion, or the Mennonite interpretation of the Christian religion, with the truth of God. That is a fundamentalist approach. If we believe that God's Spirit is the giver and sustainer of belief, we can tolerate (endure) the belief of the other. (This is a different approach from the pluralist theology of religion proposed by John Hick and others, who claim that all religions have only a limited understanding of the one ultimate point of reference.⁸)

The second distinction is more content oriented. In Christian belief every person is granted a dignity of personhood by the fact that God has put himself in relation to this person and continues to do so. In creation God created humans, men and women, in his image. Therefore, we understand ourselves and our fellow beings as bearing that image. In salvation God has reconciled himself with all creation. In Jesus Christ God reveals how he is

God and how we can be human in the ultimate sense. Through this revelation we see how we rely on the love of God and how it enables us to relate to one another. This act of reconciliation, the story of Jesus Christ, is valid for all creation and is to be accepted by all in faith. In perfection God perfects every person (and all creation) into the one that he is, by his grace and mercy. All our guilt and offences will be judged and brought to order in the eternal reconciling word that belongs to God alone.

Luther in his *Disputatio de iustificatione* of 1536 calls this the “Tolerance of God.”⁹ It is by this complete movement of the love of God that God puts himself in relation to everyone and grants the dignity of the person. This enables us to recognize in the other, in the stranger, the person created by God, loved by God, and perfected by God. This has far-reaching ethical implications. Of course, we will not be able to be tolerant like God, but we can recognize ourselves as who we are in God’s eyes.

The respect for the dignity of each person and the renunciation of any form of violence are ethical conclusions to be drawn from this faith revelation. We cannot give this up. It leads us to tolerance grounded in the center of our Christian faith.

THESIS 5 *Religion is the strongest power in building identity. In the Christian conviction that faith is not at our disposal and that God is in relation to all of creation, tolerance is grounded and justified.*

Tolerance without Limits?

Are we then promoting unlimited tolerance? Will this not lead us into indifference, into “anything goes”? Some stories in the Bible tell us about the challenge of intolerance. We find there not only the moral demand to respect and protect strangers, remembering Israel’s own experience as strangers in Egypt (Deut. 10:12-22 etc.), but also many narratives in which the other – especially the other belief – is clearly rejected. Consider Solomon’s foreign women, the Baal priests that Elijah encounters, or the prohibition of mixed marriages in the book of Ezra. “Zero Tolerance” is demanded in all these cases, and clear-cut judgments.

But take a more careful look. Intolerance is not demanded because these others are strangers or because of their different beliefs. To relate to

the others in a tolerant manner would potentially lead Israel astray from right belief in Jahweh, and seduce Israel to idolatry. This is the crucial criterion. When the temptation to idolatry is reached, there is a firm limit to tolerance. Idolatry is not tolerable. If the supremacy of God – the God of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ – is questioned because other gods are being worshipped, according to Scripture there is only one possible reaction for the people of God, intolerance.

We saw earlier that real tolerance needs to be grounded in faith. Here we see how intolerance equally needs to be grounded in faith. Again, there are numerous examples in the history of the church and in recent times. If the church is faced with convictions or actions that question the validity of our Christian confession in a way that the confession itself is distorted or becoming unrecognizable, the church must declare a *status confessionis*. The Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) in Nazi Germany¹⁰ is an example, as are the churches in South Africa that turned against apartheid.¹¹ It wasn't the reprehensible actions that called for a *status confessionis* but the idolatry that "justified" those actions. It was idolatry that was discussed in the sixteenth century too.

THESIS 6 *Christian faith does not promote unlimited tolerance. When tempted by idolatry, intolerance founded in faith is demanded.*

The Differentiation of Person and Work

Is there a contradiction between the demand for intolerance and the demand for tolerance? Here we need to introduce a distinction that can allow us to hold together both tolerance toward all humans (founded in faith) and intolerance towards any form of idolatry (also founded in faith). I suggest we employ the distinction between "person" and "work" that goes back to Augustine.¹²

God's judgment over humankind is one of revelation and restoration. Through revealing and judging the reprehensible works of a person, that person is restored, transformed. The person's dignity is untouchable. But the person's actions and convictions are to be judged. They must be revealed and judged without reducing the person to these actions and convictions. The person carries the image of God and cannot lose this through his or her own works. (This is also the theological argument against the death penalty.)

Again, this insight has far-reaching ethical implications. Its most radical form is the demand to love your enemy. Through love the enemy does not automatically become a friend; he remains the enemy. But a differentiation becomes possible: the other person can never be reduced to being an enemy. “Being an enemy” is not manifested in the person but in actions that cannot be tolerated because they would lead in the end to idolatry. The person must be tolerated because his or her personhood is the image of God.

We can define the limits of tolerance on the basis of our faith, if it is absolutely clear that the person’s dignity is not at our disposal. Intolerance toward other persons is, from a Christian viewpoint, never tolerable. But toward certain actions and convictions intolerance is not only possible, it might be demanded.

THESIS 7 *A differentiation of person and work is necessary in order to argue coherently for tolerance and intolerance founded in faith.*

The Necessity for an Open and Public Dialogue

We have seen how the Christian identity enables us to argue theologically for both tolerance and intolerance from a faith perspective. In a pluralist, multi-religious society, the state has to be neutral ideologically and religiously. But this is obviously not sufficient to shape a society of healthy relations and free from violence. It is not enough, because our societies are not composed of Christians alone. We must acknowledge that all our arguments are only a contribution from this very Christian perspective to a much larger debate. But it is our contribution!

In the end the secular state must ask every religion to share their arguments, from their own perspectives, in the public arena. What is acceptable, what is tolerable, and what is to be rejected? In this way we will learn together how religion can contribute to shaping and preserving a postmodern society, and what we cannot realistically expect. Without the dialogue of religions in the public sphere, we will hastily ask for juridical steps when confronted with conflicts (like the question of the scarf in school). Juridical measures cannot solve conflicts, they can only regulate them.

Our open, democratic forms of government depend decisively on the reasoning of the different faith traditions, if a peaceful, respectful, and nonviolent life with one another is to be possible. The postmodern form of government itself cannot create and sustain such a culture of nonviolence.

Therefore, it is also wrong to argue that religion is “private business.” Religion always pushes into the public sphere and is realized in a public manner. If we do not allow it to contribute to shaping society on the basis of its beliefs, or if we as religious bodies such as the church refuse to contribute to shaping society, the consequence will be either a laicist or an absolutist government. Both will be unable to promote nonviolent living together, because they cannot argue substantially for tolerance. The laicist government cannot promote nonviolence in the long run because all identities are relativized, which will result in indifference; the absolutist government is incapable of promoting nonviolence, since it allows only one ideology to be valid (fundamentalism). Both forms are – from the perspective of the Christian confession – not tolerable.

THESIS 8 *In the secular state, faith traditions are challenged to share their reasons for tolerance and intolerance in the public sphere, if the nonviolent co-existence of different identities is to be possible in the long run.*

Conclusion

In the future, I expect that the churches, and especially peace churches like the Mennonites, will speak up more forcefully in favor of public spaces for a dialogue of religions. We shall help to shape these spaces for the well-being of all. Because it is only in dialogue, in a direct and lived encounter with the other, that we will find out three crucial things: (1) What we can accept, because we find it in accordance with our own identity; (2) What we need to tolerate, even when not in accordance with our own identity, but bearable on the basis of our own belief; and (3) What can’t be tolerated but asks for clear opposition, because the dignity of a person is disregarded and therefore the integrity of our confession itself is in danger.

Ecumenism is such a public sphere, where these kinds of dialogues can be conducted. Our experience from interdenominational ecumenism is that through reassurance of our own identity more tolerance is possible and violence can be reduced. Now it is time to look for such experiences in the realm of interfaith dialogue. I want to believe that the peace churches especially are looking for such an ecumenical space, and that they are qualified and motivated in a special way for such dialogues.

Notes

¹ Cf. Peter L. Berger, *Der Zwang zur Häresie* (Freiburg, 1992).

² Immanuel Kant provided the most outstanding and far-reaching arguments.

³ A strong symbol of this fact is the assassination of the film-maker van Gogh in the Netherlands, killed for his provocative movie "Submission," which alleges violence against women in traditional Muslim conceptions.

⁴ Cf. Diana Mavunduse and Simon Oxley, *Why Violence? Why not Peace? A study guide to help individuals and groups in the churches to reflect and act in the Decade to Overcome Violence* (Geneva: WCC, 2002).

⁵ Bernard Williams, "Toleration: An Impossible Virtue" in D. Heyd (ed.), *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton, 1996), 18-28. Cf. also Adam Seligman, "Toleranz – eine unmögliche Tugend?" in *Ökumenische Rundschau* 3 (2003): 283-95.

⁶ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Der Riss der Sprachlosigkeit" in *Frankfurter Rundschau* (16.10.2001).

⁷ Cf. Christoph Schwöbel, "Toleranz und Glauben. Identität und Toleranz im Horizont religiöser Wahrheitsgewissheiten" in Christoph Schwöbel and D.v.Tippelskirch (eds.), *Die religiösen Wurzeln der Toleranz* (Freiburg i.B., 2002).

⁸ Cf. John Hick, *God has Many Names* (Philadelphia, 1982).

⁹ Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Toleranz Gottes und die Toleranz der Vernunft" in T. Rendtorff (ed.), *Glaube und Toleranz. Das theologische Erbe der Aufklärung* (Gütersloh, 1982), 54-73.

¹⁰ Barmen Declaration of 1934, especially Art. 2.

¹¹ Cf. the Belhar Confession of 1986. In the World Council of Churches we are now discussing whether economically dominated globalization represents such idolatry, as churches from Africa have stated in Accra. This *processus confessionis* has been initiated by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (in Debrecen, 1997) and will be a major topic at the ninth WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006.

¹² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV,4.

Preface

The second Mennonite Graduate Student Conference was held June 18-20, 2004 in Elkhart, Indiana. Twenty-five student participants gathered to listen to and discuss thirteen interdisciplinary papers on the theme, "Religious Texts." A selection of the papers appears in this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*.

The purpose of these conferences is to provide Mennonite graduate students, primarily in religion and related fields, an opportunity to present their academic research to other graduate students in an interdisciplinary context and to interact with each other as colleagues. We leave it to readers to judge whether a distinctive voice or perspective emerges. Whether particular substantive criteria qualify certain academic investigations as "Mennonite," or whether "Mennonite scholarship" is simply the academic work that Mennonites do, is a relevant but perhaps permanently unsettled question for many graduate students who are both committed Mennonites and members of their respective disciplines.

As primary organizers of the conference, we are grateful to several institutions that made it possible:

- the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, under whose auspices the event was organized by student volunteers,
- the Fund for Peoplehood Education of the Mennonite Education Agency, which provided a significant grant that made travel to the conference affordable for students throughout North America,
- the Marpeck deans (deans of Canadian and U.S. Mennonite educational institutions),
- Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and
- *The Conrad Grebel Review*, for publishing proceedings.

Papers from the first conference, held in 2002, were published in *CGR* 21.2 (Spring 2003). A third conference, again organized through the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, is being planned for Spring 2006.

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Visual Images as Text? Toward a Mennonite Theology of the Arts

Chad Martin

For most of our history, Mennonites have maintained at best a skeptical and at worst a condemning attitude toward the visual arts. In the midst of Reformation controversies, one of the key features that earned Anabaptists their label as “Radical Reformers” was their vehemently iconoclastic position. Apparently their pacifist tendencies did not extend to the inanimate objects that lavishly decorated the interior of church buildings. Ludwig Haetzer, writing in the sixteenth century, represents the prevailing attitude well:

All the images on earth carried to one pile cannot by a hair make you more pious or more reverent or draw you toward God. For Christ speaks in John 6: No one comes to me unless God the heavenly father draws him. Why do you attribute to the wood that which Christ ascribes only to His heavenly Father. . . . Why then, you lubberhead, do you come to God through these idols. . . . Therefore let all Christians strive diligently to do away with idols without hesitation before God visits them with that punishment which he is accustomed to send to all those who do not follow His word.¹

This sentiment would shape the predominant Mennonite view of visual art for centuries to come.

But obviously throughout the twentieth century Mennonites increasingly embraced the visual arts and religious images for their power to reveal truth and beauty about humanity, God, and the world we live in. Mennonites’ affinity toward religious art has shifted so dramatically that recently the Mennonite Historical Committee commissioned the creation of iconographic paintings representing “saintly” figures from Anabaptist history.² While some may question the aesthetic integrity of these icons, few would question the ethical validity of creating these images. I suspect Haetzer, however, would not find any humorous irony in this shift.

In this paper, I will examine the shifting attitude toward visual art and religious images, and I will argue that visual art has the potential to function like primary religious texts. For Mennonites in the twenty-first century, visual art can enrich spirituality and shape theology in ways that are at least as revelatory as written texts.

Historical Treatment of Visual Images

Returning to the writing of Ludwig Haetzer, one gets a sense of the disdain toward visual images expressed by early Anabaptists. Haetzer was a Radical Reformer who worked closely with Hans Denck and wrote an influential tract denouncing religious images. His tract was published in Zurich in 1523 and informed Ulrich Zwingli's iconoclastic views. Historian Charles Garside outlines the content of Haezter's tract in two parts: first, Haezter organizes thirty-three biblical texts denouncing the use of images (all drawn from the Old Testament), and second, he states four of his own arguments against images.³ The third argument in his pamphlet denounces the widely held opinion that religious images served as "books" for the laity (especially the illiterate).⁴

While there was no doubt some variety of opinion on the issue of images, Haezter's stance seems to have been the norm for Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. H.S. Bender also notes this, saying that "The Anabaptist-Mennonites, as more closely related to the Zwinglian-Calvinist phase of the Reformation than to the Lutheran, shared with the former their objection to the use of art in religious worship or in religious activity in any form. With their emphasis upon simplicity, sincerity, and humility, art seemed to them artificial and pretentious, often dangerous and wasteful."⁵ This suspicion of danger and waste seems to have carried over beyond the realm of religious images to include forbidding the display of any kind of art in one's home and the creation of art professionally. Bender notes that this suspicion intensified for those groups who maintained a rigid theology of separation from the world. Conversely, visual art was more accepted in urban Mennonite communities or in ones that embraced some national culture (such as in Holland and North Germany).⁶ Accordingly, in North America the prevailing attitude toward visual art changed as Mennonites developed institutions of higher education, began living in cities, and in general assimilated into the prevailing culture.⁷ Presumably these cultural shifts led then to the later use of images in religious settings.

Many Mennonites in the twentieth century accepted visual art into both their worship and their daily lives. And one can find a growing number of Mennonites working in arts-related professions. But the suspicion of the arts as dangerous and wasteful still exists. One Mennonite artist laments, "I am beginning to realize how extremely rare it is to see an artist – particularly from the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition – who has not bundled his or her artistic talent together with a 'helping' profession."⁸ She goes on to suggest

that “We tend to appreciate the arts in retrospect, not remembering that a subtle hostility in our culture may right now be preventing the emergence [of future Mennonite artists].”⁹

I maintain that counteracting this “subtle hostility” is vital to the livelihood of Mennonite theology and spirituality. We live in a global culture whose primary mode of communication, perhaps much like the Middle Ages in Europe, is visual, not written. I have heard our era described as post-literate or aliterate; one where nearly everyone can read, but many choose not to, whenever possible. Put simply, if we can get the message by only looking at the pictures or viewing the commercial, then we will. In his book *Artists, Citizens and Philosophers*, Duane Friesen articulates how theologians must respond to such a culture:

Learning the language of visual communication is as important as learning verbal language. It is particularly critical in our society, where visual images play a powerful role in communicating who and what we are. . . . By its very nature, the gift of artistry challenges our conventions, for it is the essence of the creative process to call into question what is and to imagine what could be.¹⁰

As a necessary first step in this direction, we must recognize the power of visual images to communicate religious concepts as well as – or better than – words. Looking beyond the scope of Anabaptist/Mennonite scholarship, one finds many contemporary authors in conversation regarding the relationship between visual art and Christian theology and spirituality. Here I will highlight a few who compare the theological significance of visual art with that of religious texts.

Richard Viladesau articulates a traditional Catholic view: “First, the study of Christian art can serve as an important aid to the history of theology. . . . Second, art itself, precisely as art, can be seen as a mode of reflection on and embodiment of Christian ideas and values and, hence, as constituting a form of theology.”¹¹ He also suggests that art can function as a direct revelation of God. “Insofar as it is beautiful, the art work evokes God as the object of desire, as what we are implicitly drawn toward by the Spirit through the dynamism of our innermost ‘heart’ Hence we may legitimately speak of beauty as an intrinsic element of both revelation and its tradition, and of sacred art as one of its primary texts or theological sources.”¹²

Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, when introducing their collection of essays, *Art as Religious Studies*, claim that “The image’s power constantly to engage and transform the viewer and admit new interpretations suggests another important facet of the work of art. [For us], works of art are primary documents in their own right. Just as a written text is a world in itself and simultaneously reflective of the world from which it comes, so too is the work of art.”¹³ Margaret Miles argues that visual images are just as influential as written texts, but she is quick to point out how what art communicate differs from what texts communicate. Acknowledging criticism of the way art communicates, she says, “Surely visual religious images are susceptible to an even more bewildering range of understandings and misunderstandings than are written theological formulations.”¹⁴ But she stresses that this ambiguity is exactly the value of images against texts. “Images do not stimulate the mind to greater precision of thought and expression. On the contrary, the contemplation of a religious image is more likely to rest the mind and to correct its busy craving for articulate verbalization.”¹⁵ Visual images are necessary, precisely because they call into question the supposed theological certainty of written texts.

Each of these examples compares visual art to written texts in order to answer a fundamental question. Phil Stoltzfus states it clearly: “Do the arts function simply to express Christian theology, or do critical advances in conceptualization sometimes appear first in artistic productions and are only later incorporated into our religious structures of meaning?”¹⁶ The above examples answer the second half of his formulation of the question with a resounding yes. Art does more than illustrate pre-existing theology; it can be a primary communicator of original theological concepts.

Directions for Reflection and Research

If the visual arts play such a necessary role in twenty-first century Christian faith, how might Mennonites begin going beyond “subtle hostility” toward a theological perspective that appreciates the formative role of images? I will suggest three directions for reflection and research that would move toward a more comprehensive Mennonite theology of the arts.

First, we could gain much insight from a critical analysis of Mennonite visual culture. Is there a “canon” of sorts of religious images that uniquely

inform theology and spirituality in a Mennonite perspective? If images form our perception of the world as much as written language, then a study of the precise images that have helped form the collective worldview of Mennonites is long overdue. Brent Plate explains the need for such critical analysis: “Visual culture is engaged with the production and the reception of visual objects, the makers and the viewers. And in this mode of analysis, gender, sex, race, nationality, religion, family, and other forces of identification come to play vital roles in the construction of the way we look, and are looked at.”¹⁷

Let me point out just one example from the Mennonite context. The woodcut print of Dirk Willems by Jan Luyken in the *Martyrs Mirror* is so widely recognized by Mennonites that it was chosen by the Mennonite Historical Committee as the first image to be rendered as an icon.¹⁸ How many of us know the martyrs’ story by way of the visual image rather than the written narrative? By it, generations of Mennonites have taken to heart Jesus’ teaching to “turn the other cheek” in a deeply profound way practically unheard of in other Christian traditions.

While my suggestion to analyze more deeply the specific visual culture of Mennonites might veer too much toward a sectarian stance, the second direction I will suggest stands in corrective tension to such sectarianism. A widely cast Mennonite theology of the arts should seriously consider how the arts have been used by Mennonites across the international spectrum. The discussion up to this point, in this presentation and elsewhere, has tended to assume a North American or at least Eurocentric context. But images and symbols communicate different meanings in different cultural contexts. Therefore, in order to escape complete cultural relativity and be relevant to Mennonites around the world, a proper study of religious visual art should examine the experiences of faithful people from a variety of cultural contexts.

Consider, for example, the evolution of Mennonite hymnody during the last fifty years. The ethno-musicological work of Mary Oyer in Africa, not to mention experiences of countless missionaries and aid workers on all continents, has left a noticeable impression on the songs we sing in worship. Like music, visual art should be a bridge between various cultures and traditions, not a barrier defining whose experience matters in conversations about theology. Most recent scholarship about art and theology, from all sorts of traditions, has been miserably lacking in its treatment of both non-European

and non-white expressions.¹⁹ A thoughtful analysis with such a cross-cultural focus would be a valuable contribution to the broader discussion of art and theology going on today.

A third direction aims at the pragmatic goal of communicating the role of visual art for Mennonite faith at the congregational level. I recently heard a womanist theologian comparing black theology with womanist theology. She explained that black theology was born in the midst of street-level struggle, while womanist theology evolved in the halls of academia. Because of this difference, black theology has been popular in African-American churches, while womanist theology continues to be treated with apprehension.²⁰ People more easily understand what touches their lives directly. Likewise, theological musings on visual art run the risk of staying stuck in academic dialogs that do not inform beliefs and practices at the congregational level. Art itself, however, is fundamentally experiential.

Mennonites are using art in worship and in the formation of their personal beliefs. Thus far, such activity seems to be happening in spite of a lack of theological guidance, rather than as a result of such guidance. Margaret Miles says guidance is crucial if we are to overcome the imbalance between the use of texts versus images in forming theology. "What is decisive in the virtually exclusive use of verbal texts in historical interpretation is the greater skill and training . . . in the interpretation of language than in the interpretation of images. If this imbalance between verbal and visual training were redressed, we could begin to learn the language of images, a language that compensates in affective richness for what it lacks in intellectual exactness."²¹

At this practical level, we might ask what constitutes formative religious art, for surely people have spiritually moving experiences with many different kinds of art in many different settings. For now, discussions of visual art for the congregational setting could include conversation about religious architecture, liturgical objects and symbols, and print material used in corporate and individual worship. These three offer particularly rich opportunity for theological reflection and insight.

To conclude, there is an obvious danger in comparing too closely visual art and written texts. I run the risk of sabotaging my own argument by saying that art and text are essentially the same things. But for those of us approaching theology from the text-heavy tradition of Anabaptism, this is a risk we must

encounter along the way toward celebrating the rich possibilities art offers. Our tradition has historically latched onto Luther's battle cry of *sola scriptura*, and therefore a critical step in acknowledging the power of art is to recognize that art has as much possibility for revelation as the written text. Once we do this, we can begin to explore the wide-ranging gifts for theology that art embodies on its own terms.

Notes

¹ As quoted in Charles Garside, Jr., "Ludwig Haetzer's Pamphlet Against Images: A Critical Study," *MQR* 34.1 (1960): 32.

² www.mcusa-archives.org/anabaptisticons/index.html (June 12, 2004).

³ Garside, 21-2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁵ H.S. Bender, "Mennonites in Art," *MQR* 27.3 (1953): 191.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷ The gist of this paragraph is directly from Bender as cited above; however, I have independently assumed that cultural assimilation during the past century led to Mennonites now accepting art in worship and daily life. Regarding religious images, Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen seems to suggest the same in "Door to the spiritual: The visual arts in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship," *MQR* 73.2 (1999): 376.

⁸ Kara Hartzler, "Artist Myths and Beyond," *Dreamseeker* 1:1 (2001): 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ Duane K. Friesen, *Artists, Citizens and Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 177.

¹¹ Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 124.

¹² *Ibid.*, 145-46.

¹³ Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, eds., *Art as Religious Studies* (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 4.

¹⁴ Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ Phil Stoltzfus, "Performative Envisioning: An Aesthetic Critique of Contemporary Mennonite Theology," *CGR* 16.3 (1998): 86.

¹⁷ S. Brent Plate, "Introduction," in *Religion, Art and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, S. Brent Plate, ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 9.

¹⁸ www.mcusa-archives.org/anabaptisticons/index.html (June 12, 2004).

¹⁹ For a notable exception, see John De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Social Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

²⁰ Dianne Stewart, "Womanist Theology for the Healthy City," (Envisioning the Healthy City: Africentric Approaches in Christian Ministry Conference, Pittsburgh, 2 April 2004).

²¹ Miles, *Image as Insight*, 34.

The Lost Cause: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Judeo-Christian Myth of Origin

Christina Reimer

On June fourth of this year, I witnessed the death of my paternal grandmother. For fifteen days after she suffered a massive stroke, our family watched her body grow thin from lack of food and her consciousness shift to a reality beyond our comprehension. The last thing to go was her ferocious thirst. I was struck by the thought, as she continued to suck the water off the small moist sponge we offered her frequently, that in dying we return to a state of infancy, in which thirst, the desire for life, defines our every moment.

As our family prepared for the funeral, one of the most controversial discussions we had was whether to open the coffin for the last time at the grave, before lowering Grandma into the ground. We decided that we would like to see her outside one last time, touched by the Manitoba prairie wind and sunshine. The experience at the grave was a silent one. No one spoke. There were no words to describe the feeling of loss, the absence, the crack left in all of us that we were forced to acknowledge as we stared at the crack in the earth which gaped like a hungry mouth.

Death, according to psychoanalysis, is an “unintegrated experience.” This means that it is asymbolic, or unrepresentable. It is linked to the realm of the sacred, as that which is beyond the descriptive power of language. Martin Heidegger points out that a person cannot remember either her own death or birth. In a sense, the memories of a person’s life constitute only the middle of a sentence, the beginning and the end of which have been forgotten. It is understandable, then, that most of the world’s religions provide a remedy for this strange amnesia, by revealing stories of the origin of the world and predictions as to how it will end. The Judeo-Christian tradition is no exception.

In this paper I will explore, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the forgetting and remembering of our mythic origins and the implications this has for language.

Symbols and Interpretations

In *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Paul Ricoeur explains that symbols constitute a “region of double meaning,” concealing naked

reality while revealing something meaningful about it. The task of interpretation is to be an “intermediary” between this symbolic realm and reality as it is.¹ Ricoeur writes:

Myths, rituals, and beliefs are . . . particular ways in which [a person] places him or herself in relation to fundamental reality, whatever it may be. . . . Symbols are the manifestation in the sensible – in imagination, gestures, and feelings – of a further reality, the expression of a depth which both shows and hides itself . . . [the] revelation of the sacred.²

He explains that the symbol is “a linguistic expression that requires an interpretation”: a deciphering of what it is that a symbol reveals about sacred reality and what it conceals. He also distinguishes between the different questions phenomenology and psychoanalysis ask of the symbolic. Phenomenology asks how a symbol might be a manifestation of the sacred; psychoanalysis asks what a symbol reveals of human desire.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud discusses the language of dreams and its potential for analysis. He argues that dreams are “psychical productions” that reveal or give expression to repressed instincts or memories. They are “the golden road to the unconscious.” Dreams speak a kind of mythic language, relating the inner dynamics of the human psyche to ancient and ongoing mythic narratives. However, they also give speech to what is speechless while subverting normative speech.

Psychoanalysis aims to reinterpret all symbols pertaining to culture: dreams, art, morality and religion, in light of their limits and what is beyond consciousness.³ Symbols are not static but ever-changing. In the opening of his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich criticizes religious fundamentalism for trying to make the symbolic fixed, to elevate what is “finite and transitory to infinite and eternal validity.”⁴ This elevation represents a closed, totalizing tendency that attempts to repress and exclude everything that smacks of difference.⁵

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan provides a helpful interpretation of the structure of culture and language. He identifies three different registers of signification: the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. The real is that which “cannot be integrated into discourse.”⁶ It is not limited to a specific content of

reality but consists of anything unspeakable or unrepresentable by language. It is also that which is unincorporated into the realm of thought, because it is unknowable. Despite its unknowability, the real pushes at the limits of what is known, making its presence perceptible while remaining mysterious. The symbolic represents reality, all the while maintaining its awareness that this is all that it is: a representation. The third register, the imaginary, claims to be synonymous with the real, founding itself on the delusion that it is real, not symbolic. James DiCenso writes: "The imaginary is generally characterized by mimetic types of identification, and by fixation, narcissism, and closed, non-reflexive modes of relation. . . . Lacan associates it primarily with the narcissistic ego's orientations of control and closure."⁷ The imaginary constitutes a literal reading of reality, a kind of religious fundamentalism that closes the symbolic off from future revelation.

For Lacan, desire is the motivating force that initiates the need for symbolic language in the first place. Desire seeks to retrieve what is lost: an unmediated relation to reality. Language becomes the intermediary between the real and the subject who wishes to be continuous with the real, as he or she once was in the mother's womb. Lacan claims it is impossible to satisfy desire; therefore, any imaginary representation claiming the capacity to completely satisfy the subject's desire to know reality as it is, is a false representation, an idolatry of the real.

The Genesis Myth of Origin

I will now apply these ideas to the beginning of our story: The Judeo-Christian myth of origin. I will briefly examine the text, searching for multiple meanings and attempting to reveal what has been either consciously or unconsciously concealed by the writer(s), hoping to make fresh encounters with the text possible.⁸ Consider the opening of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water. God said "Let there be light," and there was light divided from darkness . . . and there was morning, the first day. And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water."⁹

In Genesis, the act of creation is one of separation, of differentiation. “The created order emerges when the Word of the Father tears open the sea,” says Mark C. Taylor.¹⁰ The sea, le mer, and chaos, from whose depths comes creation, is associated with the mother, la mère, whom Taylor calls the “lost cause.”¹¹ According to various sources, including Karl Barth, the two-part Genesis creation account (chapter two written c. 1446 BCE and chapter one, c. 560 BCE) borrows in a “directly dependent” fashion from the earlier Babylonian creation myth of Enuma elish (c. 2000 BCE). This myth depicts the slaying of the mother goddess Tiamat by the god Marduk. Her split body, described as a watery chaos, then forms the foundation of heaven and earth. The Genesis account depicts the spirit of the Father-creator converting a formless watery void into form through “the word.” However, Genesis fails to include the mother goddess’s body in its rendering of creation. In the beginning was the Word – the Word of the Father. “Before the beginning there was separation, separation from the Mother.”¹² The mother lingers beyond the boundaries of the God-Father’s spoken Word.

Pamela Sue Anderson, in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, discusses the tendency in dominant patriarchal narratives to push the feminine into the shadows or margins of the text. The feminine is relegated to the space occupying the real or those aspects of reality that go unrepresented. An example is seen in what Anderson calls “founding myths”:

[An] example of a founding myth [is] the Babylonian myth concerning the [world’s] origin, which is earlier than the myth [of Adam]. . . . The female goddess Tiamat represents a primordial chaos out of which order, the heavens, and the earth are created. . . . Images from this Babylonian myth appear in the Hebrew scriptures. Significantly images of Tiamat include the vastness of marine waters and the power to either create or destroy. It appears that, in the earliest of mythical types constituting patriarchy, the primordial female figure represents the evil of excessive disorder and the dangers of female fluidity. The mythical killing of the primordial mother represents the symbolic act of matricide which founds the meaning of patriarchal history.¹³

Two points are particularly striking in this passage. Both are related to Anderson’s account of mythic matricide. In *Group Psychology and the*

Analysis of the Ego, Freud constructs a primal myth of the killing of the horde father by his sons that is foundational to the development of his Oedipal theory.¹⁴ This theory suggests that the ambivalent son desires to both become and annihilate the father. However, Anderson's account of the Tiamat myth describes the killing of the primal mother by the father. This killing constitutes the "meaning of patriarchal history" or the establishment of the father's law over the mother's body. Mother, as chaotic water, becomes simply an undifferentiated, unspeaking Thing.

The second point about mythic matricide is that the Hebrew telling of the myth of Adam does not even mention the mother's body as the material from which the earth is fashioned, referring only to the anonymous watery chaos or void. This forgetting of the symbolic sacrifice of the mother determines her status as the "lost cause." Karl Barth argues that over centuries the Hebrews attempted to separate themselves from the other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, including pagan goddess cultures. Subsequently, the writing of the myth of Adam, which he dates sometime during the Babylonian exile, altogether omits the role of Tiamat and consequentially the mother's active participation in the creative process.

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth distinguishes between "myth" and "saga." Myth is associated with pagan religions, where gods are personifications of nature. These myths, cyclical in form, were later rationalized by Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle to form the foundations of metaphysics. Saga, by contrast, is associated with Hebrew culture. As opposed to myth it is defined as *Heilsgeschichte*, sacred history. However, it relates more to prehistory. The Hebrews interpreted their later history in light of these origins. Therefore, instead of transforming myth into metaphysics, they transformed saga into history. Barth concludes that Hebrew tradition is not primarily rational but revelatory. Thus, ongoing experience, not only law, is what characterizes that tradition.¹⁵ It is ironic that because of Barth's careful research, tracing the formative elements of the Hebrew "myth" of origins to the earlier Babylonian myth of Tiamat, we benefit from an admission that the Hebrews excluded Tiamat from *Heilsgeschichte*.

It is our project to take Barth's research into account while considering this exclusionary process and contemplating what has been both revealed and concealed in the symbolism of the Judeo-Christian narrative tradition.

Lacan also provides a helpful, if somewhat problematic, means of reading the Babylonian-Adamic creation myth. We can link his psychoanalytic construction of the origin of desire with the loss of the primordial and personal mother. Lacan argues that desire is activated when the subject is removed from its preconscious, prelingual state of union with the mother, creating what Taylor calls “a nascent tear” within both the mother and child.¹⁶ This tear is a hole, a lack, that initiates the desire for its own filling.¹⁷ Breastfeeding can allay the pain of separation, but eventually the child must be weaned. Here, to illustrate my point, I’ll use an example from the stories my husband Mike tells of growing up on a dairy farm. He remembers lying in bed as a child listening with horror to the sound of calves crying longingly for their mothers, and of mothers crying with equal longing for their calves, after they’d been separated to different parts of the farm for weaning. Their only desire was to be reunited.

Lacan describes the phallus as a symbol of fulfillment in having the potential to fill a gap. However, it cannot fill what it proposes to fill in any lasting way. The phallus, for him, is identified with the Father, language, and the social order. The “phallic signifier” substitutes language for the desired mother’s body. Symbiotic fusion with the mother is exchanged for the ‘otherness’ of language and culture, represented by the father.¹⁸ The appropriation of language compensates for the infant’s mother loss. Language functions as a coping mechanism, helping the growing child to forget its regressive, singular fixation with the mother and to start interacting with other aspects of the complicated world around it.

A problem in this reading is that “Mother,” like Tiamat, comes to represent something unspoken, unspeaking. “She” does not participate in the father’s naming of law and language, of signification, but is essentially left out. Yet Lacan to his credit does not speak essentially of “mother” but regards “her” from her symbolic position within the language of the father, the language spoken for her that she mouths when she does speak. The myth of the Babylonian mother is both appropriated and ignored by the Hebrew father. In a strange way “mother” becomes “a presence made of absence,” a phrase Hegel uses to describe language.¹⁹ Language, like the repressed mother, “harbors an absence resulting from the negation of the sensual immediacy of the here and now.”²⁰

Feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, discussing the phenomenon of the “mother tongue,” argues there is no adequate [religious] language for women, only “male-neutral” language claiming to speak for everyone. Without mentioning Lacan, she reiterates his claim that the mother as well as the father can serve a “phallic function” in that she can reproduce the same patriarchal history by continuing to speak the same language, the mother tongue. In this way she is the carrier or bearer of male-dominated myth, culture, and male-neutral language.²¹

In order for the male-neutral language of established myth to be broken, a “hierophany,” or breakthrough of the sacred into the existing socio-linguistic order, must occur. World religions scholar Mircea Eliade writes:

It could be said that the history of religions is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities. [With each new hierophany] we are confronted by the same mysterious act – the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world.²²

A hierophanous event opens a space within the existing symbolism of a religion for transformation, for the possibility of new interpretations. The symbol thus becomes a porous body open to change rather than closed to new readings.

In *Camera Lucida* philosopher Roland Barthes distinguishes between art as literal representation and art as having the potential to break through tired forms of meaning. Literal representation is a container from which nothing comes out or leaps out of the frame.²³ This form of art cannot pierce the viewer; it lacks hierophanous qualities having the power to reconfigure symbols in a meaningful way. By contrast, art with the capacity to pierce has what Barthes calls “punctum.” Without it, a piece of art is a “passive object.” Punctum is what escapes the frame and transcends even the artist’s purposes. “[Punctum] goes off from the scene, like cupid’s arrow, and comes and pierces me.”²⁴ The viewer is pricked by the dynamic energy of the punctum and the force of its hidden potential. The punctum gives art an unconscious, uncontrollable quality. It has the same function as a hierophany, in being a manifestation of something previously unknowable by the viewer.

The hierophanous event that pierces the established symbolic order, though seemingly a new occurrence, may not be new at all but very old, older than memory. In psychoanalytic terms a hierophany might actually be a return

of the repressed. Psychoanalysts agree that repressed contents cannot remain repressed but will inevitably surface in dreams or visions, often in monstrous or distorted form.

As we have seen, Anderson claims that images of Tiamat appear throughout Hebrew scripture. Since she does not elaborate on this assertion, I can only guess she is referring to biblical allusions to a similar creature, the Leviathan, the monster of chaos who is not killed by God but imprisoned or chained so that the order of creation can be maintained. Leviathan is not mentioned very often; it is a shadowy marine creature lurking on the outskirts of biblical representation. It is fearful because it embodies the repressed contents of the unconscious, the abyss, appearing monstrous because of its lack of conscious definition. In the biblical book of Job, Leviathan resurfaces when Job, a highly ethical man, suffers unjustly at the hand of a supposedly just God. This contradiction jeopardizes the established Hebrew understanding of God, a contradiction exhibited by Job's friends' conflicting and ultimately inadequate explanations for his misfortune. Such a monumental shift in religious understanding is often accompanied by fear of madness or chaos.

Leviathan is not the only biblical symbol we can associate with Tiamat. There is also the rarely mentioned female wisdom figure of Sophia. In Proverbs, Sophia says, "I was there when [God] marked out the horizon on the face of the deep. . . . /Then I was the [worker] at his side" (8:27-30). Likewise, the book of Jeremiah reads: "God founded the world by wisdom" (10:12). The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus contains this speech by Sophia: she says, "[In the beginning] it was I who covered the earth like a mist./ My dwelling place was in high heaven/. . . Alone I made a circuit of sky/ and traversed the depths of the abyss. . . . Before time began . . . [I was created] / and until the end of time I shall endure" (24:3-9). In all three passages, wisdom is foundational to the structuring of the universe. As embodied wisdom Sophia is the other side of Leviathan, representing the ordering of creation rather than a threat to order.

Conclusion

My intentions have been to show we have the potential to renew language and myth through reflection and interpretation. I will end with a section of Canadian Mennonite poet Patrick Friesen's poem "anna (first dance)," which

is about the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, who wrote subversive poetry during the Russian Revolution until her son was thrown into prison, after which she remained silent. Friesen writes:

I don't love the prayer rug obedience or disobedience nothing/
that absolute I love the babylonian body and the human/ wound I
love the surprising word the sinuous approach . . . I love words in
the air balanced between mouths and ears/ I love the way they're
smoke before they're stone/ but it's true I think there's not much a
voice can say there's a/ limit I guess to art there's no end to desire.²⁵

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Notes

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ James J. DiCenso, *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1999), 43.

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

⁵ James J. DiCenso, "Anxiety, Risk and Transformation: Revisiting Tillich with Lacan" in *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought*, ed. Clayton Crockett (New York: Routledge, 2001), 51.

⁶ *The Other Freud*, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹ Verses 1-6.

¹⁰ Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹² Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 150.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and The Analysis of the Ego*, ed. Angela Richards and trans. James Strachey, vol. 12: Civilization, Society and Religion (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 3:1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 87.

¹⁶ *Altarity*, 100.

¹⁷ The French word translated as "lack" is "manque." Lacan uses this word in a double sense, in that it means both that something wants, or is missing, and something wants, or desires.

¹⁸ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Lacan and the Subject of Language* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 271.

¹⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998) 58-66; 79-89.

²⁰ *Altarity*, 88.

²¹ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 9-10.

²² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 11.

²³ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 151.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Patrick Friesen, *Blasphemer's Wheel* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1995), 94.

The Flooded Text: Finding Dry Land in *The Wings of the Dove*

Jacob Jost

*And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove,
which returned not unto him any more. – Genesis 8:12, KJV*

*The sense was constant for her that their relation might have been afloat,
like some island of the south, in a great warm sea that represented,
for every conceivable chance, a margin, an outer sphere, of
general emotion, and the effect of the occurrence of anything
in particular was to make the sea submerge the island,
the margin flood the text. – The Wings of the Dove, 142*

The Wings of the Dove, published in 1902, is one of Henry James's last novels. In its ten "Books," it tells the story of a wealthy but terminally ill American heiress, Milly Theale, who travels to Europe with a companion, Susan Stringham. In England they encounter a friend of Milly's, a poor journalist named Merton Densher who is engaged to an intelligent woman named Kate Croy. Though its ending is typically Jamesian in its inconclusiveness, the novel is essentially about the attempt made by Merton, led on by Kate, to make advances to the wealthy Milly in order to get access to her money. Like all of James's novels, it has attracted a great deal of critical attention. In this paper, I will attempt to draw out the implications of a single symbol that runs in various forms throughout the novel: the story of the Flood and Noah's Ark.

The action takes place on the ark. For nearly all the novel, James restricts the cast of characters to Milly Theale, Susan Stringham, Maud Lowder, Kate Croy, Merton Densher, Sir Luke Strett, and Lord Mark. Though a man short, this number roughly tracks the original passenger list of Noah, Ham, Shem, Japheth, and their wives (Gen. 7:7).¹ When other characters appear, generally en masse, James tends to describe them in animal terms, as though

they were below deck, as when he calls London socialites a “foolish flock” and a “huddled herd.” Over the course of the novel, the cramped vessel containing James’s small cast peregrinates through America, Switzerland, England, and Italy, floating over the canals of Venice and the parks of London. Only when Milly Theale, the dove, dies, and returns to her companions no more (“For a flight, I trust, to some happiness greater – !”), do Kate and Merton come to rest on the solid ground of Mt. Ararat, from whence they can take their solitary way, leaving the ark empty behind them.

“Attention of Perusal”: James’s Use of Metaphor

James’s use of metaphor and allusion is an integral component of the often remarked-upon “complexity” of particularly his late style. Images, un- or half-articulated symbols, and puns all reveal things in the late novels that his characters are unable or unwilling to say: the recurrent imagery of immersion and “touching bottom” in *The Ambassadors* anticipates the riverside location of Strether’s epiphanic sighting, just as the eponymous golden bowl symbolizes the rifts within the circle of relationships in James’s final novel. As Virginia Fowler says, “We are obliged to allow the repetition of images and metaphors in different contexts to create within our minds the associative meanings that both clarify and complicate the text for us” (181).

One source of this complication is the number of metaphorical systems that James intertwines in his novels; as Fowler points out, Milly is variously interpreted as “American Girl, princess, dove” by the narrator and the characters around her. A reader explicating patterns in the novel derived from the third of these interpretations cannot expect complete metaphorical consistency with passages using the language, for example, of Milly as “princess.” Little is dovelike, though much is regal, about the Bronzino portrait said to resemble her that she sees in Book V. Likewise, chronological imperfections are unavoidable when intertextual correspondences are drawn from imagery and metaphor in addition to plot. The curse of Ham only descends long after Noah and his family has left the ark, but the abuse Merton heaps on Lord Mark through the final two books (“idiot of idiots”, “ass”, giver of a “dastardly stroke”, “scoundrel” etc.) anticipate it.

Biblical criticism offers a relevant precedent for this sort of interpretive multiplicity and achronicity: the fourfold hermeneutic first developed in the

Middle Ages that reads sacred text literally, allegorically (typologically), tropologically (morally), and anagogically (eschatologically). Gabrielle Botta suggests that James's Christological representation of Milly Theale is intended to make readers aware of this fourfold interpretive schema. Botta finds ample biographical and textual evidence to support the suggestion. Henry James, Sr. gave his children a liberal but extensive religious education, and James himself expressed great admiration for the technique of Hawthorne, for whose Puritan subjects fourfold interpretation remained a viable Biblical hermeneutic and who was capable of drawing on religious concepts for artistic purposes: "The sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind [. . .] seems to exist there merely for an artistic or literary purpose" (quoted in Botta, 142). The multiple interpretations James's characters bring to bear on Milly represent the different kinds of Biblical hermeneutic, though Christian dogma is replaced by a pluralistic worldview in which different interpretations compete rather than form a harmonious whole (Botta, 146).

This analysis has two further implications for my argument. First, finding Biblical allegory in James's works is not inconsistent with readings stressing the plurality and indeterminacy of his language: just the opposite. Second, interpretations seeing Milly as Noah's dove, the dove of Psalm 55, the dove of the Holy Spirit, and as Christ himself, are not by their nature competitive. Each dove should be read as the type of the others; in Jamesian terms, there are multiple figures in the carpet.

At the same time Christian theologians were developing the technique of the fourfold hermeneutic to read their bi-testamental text, their Kabbalistic colleagues were creating their own commentary on the dove. I quote from the novel *The Island of the Day Before* by semiotician Umberto Eco:

Psalm 68 mentions the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold [. . .] why, in Proverbs, does a similar image recur when "a word fitly spoken" is likened to "apples of gold in settings of silver"? And why in the Song of Solomon, addressing the girl "who has doves' eyes," does the speaker say to her, "O my love, we will make thee circlets of gold with studs of silver"?

The Jews commented that the gold here is scripture and the silver refers to the blank spaces between the letters and the words

[. . .]. in every sentence of Scripture [. . .] there are two faces, the evident face and the hidden face, and the evident one is silver, but the hidden one is more precious because it is of gold [. . .] Having the eyes of a dove means not stopping at the literal meaning of the words but knowing how to penetrate their mystical sense. (353-54)

James clearly places such “golden meanings” in the omissions threatening to overwhelm what is actually said in his novel. The dove, in addition to all its other typological significances, symbolizes the quintessentially Jamesian search for hidden meaning itself.

It is necessary to make these points because *The Wings of a Dove* is not a crudely allegorical text. It has “multiplicity, contraries which are not reconciled, but challenge and supersede each other; different approaches are tried and abandoned,” and not all of it can be read in terms of the metaphors of ark and deluge (Bradbury, 73). In his preface to the novel, James offers a complex metaphor for reading his books:

Attention of perusal [. . .] is what I at every point [. . .] absolutely invoke and take for granted; . . . The enjoyment of a work of art, the acceptance of an irresistable illusion, constituting, to my sense, our highest experience of ‘luxury’, the luxury is not greatest, by my consequent measure, when the work asks for as little attention as possible. It is greatest [. . .] when we feel the surface, like the thick ice of the skater’s pond, bear without cracking the strongest pressure we throw on it. The sound of the crack one may recognize, but surely never to call it luxury.

A work of art thus supports us, as we try to break through it by means of close reading and discover what lies beneath the surface. The greater the work of art, however, the harder we must press or hammer in order to break it open. And the most luxurious works never crack at all. Like Joyce and Nabokov² after him, James subscribes to an aesthetic of making reading difficult, asking us to look for things that are not actually there. To mix metaphors, the ark is below the ice. Nevertheless, the plot and imagery of the Deluge are a powerful undercurrent running through the whole novel.

“Small Floating Island”: Space in *The Wings of the Dove*

On the ark, space is at a premium. Wherever James’s characters travel, they almost always find themselves enclosed in rooms as if actually upon a ship, whether in Chirk St., Lancaster Gate, Brook St., the Palazzo Laporelli, or Densher’s “shabby but friendly” Venetian lodgings, where Kate finally “comes” to him.³ Admittedly, Milly and Merton occasionally walk the deck, and Merton and Kate even sit on deck-chairs in Kensington Gardens, but such breaths of fresh air are unusual. James is attuned to the different settings in which his characters operate and establishes the architectural qualities of their various rooms carefully. On the first page, for example, we sibilate our way through chez Croy, seeing the “shabby sofa” giving “the sense of the slippery and the sticky” and the “sallow prints on the walls.” When we meet Kate again at Lancaster Gate, she is sitting by the upstairs fire, where the sofa is small and silk-covered, excruciatingly aware of her aunt, a lioness below decks: “Sitting far downstairs Aunt Maud was yet a presence” (20-21). When establishing Susan Stringham’s bona fides as an author of fiction, James, writing with unusual levity, seems to conceive of the writer’s art in terms of the choice of room in which the action of a story occurs: “She wrote short stories,⁴ and she fondly believed she had her ‘note’, the art of showing New England without showing it wholly in the kitchen” (76). And when the reader learns second-hand that Milly dies when she learns that Merton and Kate are in love, it is in terms that place Milly in relation to her sick-room rather than the people in it: ““She has turned her face to the wall”” (410).

With the exception of when they take walks, even the characters’ travels are in enclosed spaces, rooms, cabins. Merton and Kate meet for the second time in a carriage of the underground railroad rather than on the street. Mrs. Lowder travels in a solid, enclosed carriage. Even the gondola carrying Sir Luke Strett to his waiting patient after Merton meets him at the Venice train station is equipped with a felze, which, Peter Brooks notes in the Oxford edition, is “the covered and curtained passenger’s compartment in a gondola.”

James thus keeps his characters cooped up, even as they move around the world. It is like they are in a ship, and both the dove and the lion are kept in their cages. One effect of this strategy is to heighten the sense of conscious artistry in the novel. James’s intentional use of “scene” and “picture” relate his fiction to theater and painting, two genres which must deal with spatial limitations; the former restricted to a stage and a set, the latter within its

frames.⁵ Baggy monstrosities like *War and Peace* or *The Newcomes* can introduce vast spaces like the burning city of Moscow into the novel, but renouncing open space relates the novel to the theater, where vast spaces cannot be readily depicted, and directs attention to smaller actions (the pouring of tea, the receiving of an iced coffee, the contemplation of a window view) and dialogue, much like a modern chamber film.

Likewise, the limited number of “speaking parts” in *The Wings of the Dove*, fixed above at roughly eight, gives it a theatrical economy, as if James were putting it on as a play and could only afford a medium-sized cast.⁶ A stage is small, but a picture is even smaller; when Milly is compared in Book V to a Bronzino portrait, she is contained within a very narrow frame indeed. This frame expands a bit to encompass a bridegroom and guests at a soiree later that is compared to Veronese’s Wedding at Cana, but ultimately constricts again to an ark-like coffin when the heroine is “dead, dead, dead” (157).

James’s oeuvre is saturated with a strong concept of place. One of his favorite plot techniques is defining his characters in respect of their place of origin and then setting them in a foreign environment and watching them try to adjust.⁷ In *The Wings of the Dove*, the recurring chambers keep the characters close together; even when Milly is on the other side of the European continent from Merton, Kate, and the narrator in Book X, her presence is felt, almost suffocatingly. Just as Aunt Maud as a caged lion “remains a presence” even when in a different room of the house, Milly as a dead dove remains inescapably present even after she has died in a different room in a different house. Kate conceives of the dove’s wings as close, tangible, keeping Merton and herself framed and enclosed: “‘Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us’” (508). This physical proximity, almost intimacy, was associated with the dove metaphor from Kate’s very first use of it at Lancaster Gate: “Poor Milly hereby enjoyed one of her views of how people, wincing oddly, were often touched by her. ‘Because you’re a dove.’ [Kate says.] With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced” (201-02). At the end, Kate’s “embrace” of Milly becomes Milly’s “cover”- ing of Kate and Merton. All James’s characters are in the same boat, and very close to each other indeed.

There are suggestions in the book’s initial phase that this physical proximity corresponds to genuine communication, that Kate and Merton, at least, can “think whatever they like” and furthermore “say it” (47). James’s

ark is the only place where the couple can be real: “nothing could have served more to launch them [. . .] on their small floating island than such an assumption that they were only making believe everywhere else” (*ibid.*). This ideal communication, qualified at the time as based on an assumption, quickly proves illusory. The silences, omissions, and taboos characterizing both the characters’ interaction with each other and James’s narrator’s treatment of the whole, threaten to overwhelm the information that is given. The closeness of space on James’s ark becomes an ironic commentary on the mental distances its passengers keep from each other.

“Forty days and forty nights”: Time and Waiting

The novel’s use of time, in contrast to its tactile, almost claustrophobic sense of space, shares an emphasis on abstract, ritualistic time quantities with the Biblical story. Merton spends the book’s entire duration waiting; he waits in the Gardens for Kate Croy, waits fifteen minutes in the drawing room before his interview with Mrs. Lowder, and, much later, can still be found waiting (three days, no less⁸) for news of Milly after Lord Mark’s visit, waiting for Sir Luke Strett at the railroad station,⁹ waiting a fortnight before calling on Kate and Mrs. Lowder, and then waiting two months for the New York lawyers’ letter containing Milly’s will and testament. All the time, Densher is waiting to marry his secret fiancée, a wait Kate extends into the eternal when first contracting herself: “‘I engage myself to you for ever’” implies with a sort of verbal irony that a wedding will never come (68). Merton’s passivity is like that of Noah, who, patiently awaiting the will of God, endures “forty days and forty nights” of rain, followed by “an hundred and fifty days” of flood, then another “forty days,” then “yet other seven days,” and “yet other seven days” (Gen. 7:12-8:12). The olive branch that Milly sends him and Kate burns, arrives on Christmas Eve and is thus integrated into the sacred calendar, equated with a gift from the Divine. In both stories time periods accumulate, prolonging a period of sequestration and self-denial.¹⁰

“The Lord shut him in”: Setting, Immurement, and Reification in James’s Ark

As the hard rain begins to fall, Noah and his seven companions enter the ark and are sealed off from view: “and the Lord shut him in” (Gen. 7:16). The Biblical narrator honors the privacy of this divine sequestration, making no mention of Noah’s activities other than confirming his survival, until Noah

opens “the window of the ark” after nearly a year (8:6). While the text describes the progress of the waters outside and the death of all living things on the earth, the interior of the ark remains a cipher. Until he curses Ham, Noah maintains a complete silence throughout the narrative.¹¹ This narration-by-omission will be familiar to any reader of James’s late style. In assuming a selective third-person voice, James describes the progress of the waters outside his character without choosing to empathically show the processes going on inside. Milly in particular is “sealed up” inside herself by the narrator, whose depiction of her, after her ominous interview with Lord Mark at the end of Book VII, becomes completely elliptical.¹² In setting up scenes, recording conversations, and indicating gesture, tone, and facial expression, James intentionally depicts all his characters, even those whose mental processes the narrator is ostensibly following, from the outside; as things, not people.

This reificatory process, of which the Lord’s immurement of Noah is a type, is a key component of James’s style in the novel.¹³ Both people and their mental abstractions are reduced metaphorically to concrete objects, often in complex relationships. The process begins in the Preface, where James makes his work a bridge whose stylistic piers are ephemeral but whose load-bearing capacity is real. The piers “were an illusion, for their necessary hour” but the span seems to be “a reality” (xxxix). William Stowe argues that these reificatory figures cannot ultimately be traced back to their abstract sources: “the current phase of Densher’s relationship with Aunt Maud [. . .] is characterized in such a contradictory fashion as to constitute on the literal level a moment of indecipherable non-meaning.” He goes on to identify some interpretive possibilities for this perplexing double figure, but concludes that James’s figures are “nodes of unreduced plurality – islands, perhaps, of deviant [Barthesian] bliss in a rising tide of [Barthesian] pleasure” (197).¹⁴ I would make them Milly’s “floating island[s],” sealed arks whose contents are not accessible but whose physical exteriors remain buoyant.¹⁵

Metaphors often equate an abstraction with a concrete object, but the complexity of James’s figurative language takes this process to new levels. A particularly beautiful example of metaphor as a reificatory tool occurs when Maud becomes a weaver and her plots a tapestry: “[Lord Mark] was personally the note of the blue – like a suspended skein of silk within reach of the broiderer’s hand. Aunt Maud’s free-moving shuttle took a length of him at rhythmic intervals; and one of the accessory truths that flickered across to

Milly was that he ever so consentingly knew he was being worked in" (152). Aunt Maud, like the short-story writer Susan Stringham, creates a work of art, weaving her own text that is concrete rather than merely semiotic. The abstract "truth" of her process moves across the loom to Milly like a concrete shuttle. Maud's marriage plans for Kate become both a physical object and a work of art, and the truths and perceptions forming it become the physical frame upon which it is woven.¹⁶

James's use of setting provides another way to transform the abstract into the concrete, enclosing an idea within a physical ark. Michiel Hayns argues that the novel's various settings together constitute a Saussurian *langue*, of which each individual setting is a *parole* (117). Thus Densher can read "the message of [Mrs. Lowder's] massive florid furniture, the immense expression of her signs and symbols." Signifiers become physical objects, allowing Mrs. Lowder to communicate with Densher even when she is not in the room, just as Milly's indisposition and the three days of sepulchral silence will allow the "court" and "outer staircase" of her "piano nobile" to communicate a different message to him seven books later. Both women are immured within the enclosed spaces of their own respective houses.

Even James's puns (and he indulges in punning to an unusual extent here) have this reificatory effect. A pun draws attention away from the referent, the physical object, by playing with relationships existing only on the level of the signifier. But James's puns turn abstract concepts into physical objects, as when Susan Stringham's connection to the Milly's brilliance becomes a torch made of pitch: "her own light was too abjectly borrowed and that it was as a link alone, fortunately not missing, that she was valued" (188). Likewise, the communication when Merton and Kate "meet" becomes the former's physical meat: "'Meet,' my dear man,' she expressly echoed; 'does it strike you that we get . . . so very much out of our meetings?' 'On the contrary – they're starvation diet.'" (351). Three pages later, after placing Kate and Merton "in the middle of the Piazza San Marco," the narrator informs us that Milly's absence "had made a mark, all round." Milly's absence creates the real presence of St. Mark's Cathedral.

Perhaps the most radical of these Jamesian objectifications comes in the portrait scene. As Elissa Greenwald points out, Milly's English adventure is highly romantic up to the day of the Matcham party. Through Milly's eyes

we see “bright lights, careful arrangement, and people who talk like characters in a play” (182-83). But when Milly comes face to face with her Doppelgänger, she not only sees herself reduced to the physical object of a canvas, as ephemeral as Aunt Maud’s tapestry, she also sees through the opacity of James’s uncrackable ice into the real world. “The image resembles that of Minny Temple in James’s memory, as described in the Preface. Milly Theale confronts the very image of her creation [. . .] [and] her own mortality” (183). In Biblical language, the temple is the human body, and the portrait Milly sees is a corpse – the ultimate reification of the body and her ineffable fate.¹⁷

Conclusion: The Silent Ark

The ark thus has multiple relevances to *The Wings of the Dove*. As a component of James’s use of the medieval fourfold hermeneutic, the ark relates to other Biblical tropes in the novel such as Milly’s Christological and pneumatological associations. This is an aspect of James’s general approach to metaphor, which creates multiple significations irreducible to a single metaphorical system.

The story of the Flood is enormous, absolute, one in which “all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered” and “every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, and all that was in the dry land, died” (Gen. 7:18, 21-22). Enormous lengths of time pass. But it is also a small, intimate story, with a small cast of characters contained in a single, rather snug setting. Throughout the novel James’s characters are allured by the absolute, by the infinite, by “everything.”¹⁸ But in James’s flood, everything is destroyed and “nothing” is left instead. The dry land at the end of the novel allows the characters to go their separate ways; Kate and Merton stop looking at each other, climb down from their ladders, and return to their respective gardens. Dry land allows no one to be fruitful and multiply; James’s melodramatic ending becomes ironic in addition to tragic. While we read this novel, the terrain of meaning is constantly shifting beneath us, as the flood of the narrative carries us along. When we find dry land, the ark breaks open, and *The Wings of the Dove*, abruptly over, becomes completely silent.

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Notes

¹ Lionel Croy makes a tempting candidate for Ham, having committed some crime that makes him the accursed of the earth, but since neither Croy nor Mrs. Condrip appears explicitly on stage in the second volume they will be presumed, metaphorically at least, drowned, and Kate will be taken at her word when she broods about "the submersion of her father." The silent Eugenio will make the eighth crew member, though he is also paired off like an animal, and Lord Mark, who gazes upon Kate and Merton's nakedness, will be Ham instead of Lionel. That Maud, Kate and Milly underscore the Diluvian theme by becoming kids, lionesses, vultures, eagles, lions, and doves will not disqualify them from counting as people. Milly's unfortunate family, dead and more or less unmourned, will also number among the drowned.

² The echo is presumably unintentional, but Nabokov also invokes the image of the reader throwing him- or herself against a translucent surface, in an ineffectual attempt to reach the meaning on the other side, in the opening couplet of *Pale Fire*: "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain/ By the false azure in the windowpane."

³ In the Palazzo Laporelli, where the ark comes to rest and Milly is released, James is explicit: "She was in it, as in the ark of her deluge." Though Milly will "ask nothing more than to sit tight in it and float on and on," the reader may suspect that the ark is about to become a mountain-top. In the previous line Milly, with regard to her "place" had "a vision of clinging to it," which recalls her vertigo in the final sentence of V, when "she continued to cling to the Rockies." In X, Merton finds himself on "a small emergent rock in the waste of waters [. . .] clinging to it and to Susan Shepherd, figur[ing] himself hidden from view." He remains in the now stationary but still enclosing ark, waiting in vain for the dove's return.

⁴ "She wrote short stories" tracks "Susan Shepherd Stringham," which occurs in the previous sentence, in a positively Earwickerian way. For James, whose characters are each attempting to impose their own narrative on the others, you are what you write. The only paper mentioned by name in the novel is Mrs. Stringham's precious Boston Transcript, but one can only hope that Merton Densher's journalism is written for the Daily Mail.

⁵ James's uses of "scene" and "picture" in his prefaces and other critical writings are fairly technical and have meanings for novelistic composition that are not intuitively related to their roles in the dramatic and visual arts. According to Robert L. Cesario, "picture appears to be analytic and contemplative narrative reasoning rather than dynamic presentation of acts" while the scenic mode, which he equates with drama, is "exclusively objective representation of appearances" (191).

⁶ As far as dramatic roles go, the Preface designates Mrs. Stringham as Milly's "fairly choral Bostonian," though she hardly meets the Sophoclean standard for either keeping the audience informed or warning the heroine of approaching danger. James's use of a chorus reaches its apotheosis in *The Golden Bowl*.

⁷ James was interested by the effect of Europe on Americans all the way from *Roderick Hudson* to *The Golden Bowl*. But he also considers the effect of New England on Southerners in *The Bostonians*, while Susan Stringham, of Burlington, Vermont considers Boston "far too south" (75)!

⁸ Milly has been frequently identified as a Christological symbol; for John Carlos Rowe, "the incarnation, Passion, crucifixion, and ascent of Christ" constitute "the central myth of the novel" albeit one whose logocentricism James entirely undermines (134). The three days of Christ's passion, obliquely mirrored in the three days of Merton's waiting, are a particularly important component of this identification, because of the statement attributed to Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The intense psychobiographical associations this metaphor would have held for James, who made Milly in the image of his beloved cousin Minny Temple, are obvious.

⁹ The doctor's visit corresponds to the beginning of Gen. 8:2: "the fountains of the deep and the waters of heaven were stopped," or, as James says, "The weather changed, the stubborn storm yielded, and the autumn sunshine [. . .] came into its own again" (428). As the water recedes, the ark comes to rest in 8:4: "And the ark rested in the seventh month [. . .] upon the mountains of Ararat." James causes Merton to come to rest, if only temporarily, on the same page: "That was where the event had landed him – where no event in his life had landed him before." Sir Luke Strett's arrival really does make Merton's boat stop rocking: "The result of it was the oddest consciousness as of a blest calm after a storm. He had been trying for weeks

[. . .] to keep superlatively still [. . .] but he looked back on it now as the heat of fever" (435). Only once the rain stops and the ark comes to rest does Noah release the dove, just as Milly dies only after Merton becomes still.

¹⁰ Analogically, the forty days of the deluge anticipate the Israelites' forty years in the desert and Jesus' forty day fast in the wilderness; the latter, which included three satanic temptations, is clearly invoked in Book III when Milly "was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth" (89).

¹¹ The narrative ubiquity and thematic importance of silence in James's novel are important critical commonplaces. For John Auchard silence and related phenomena constitute Milly's, and the novel's, "abyss" (102-04).

¹² Milly, as well as the other characters, becomes another ark: the Ark of the Covenant, into which no human can look. Again, the ark is a type for James's hidden and inaccessible meanings.

¹³ There is another fascinating scriptural precedent for this Jamesian reification. When the authorities forbade the wearing of phylacteries, the prophet Elisha donned them anyway. "He was seen by a *casdor* (*quæstor*), and the latter pursued him. Seeing that he could not escape, Elisha took the phylacteries from his head and carried them in his hand. When questioned by the *quæstor* what he carried in his hand, he replied: 'Wings of doves.' When opening his hand, he really found doves' wings." (Babylonian Talmud, 1:XIX). The dove's wings symbolize the merely textual (the Torah written on Elisha's phylacteries) becoming the physically real (doves' wings), just as externalities replace dialogue and interior thought in the sequestration of James's ark.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes considers the Noah story as a myth of semiotic absence: "if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father – [this] would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibitions of nudity, all collected in our culture in the myth of Noah's sons covering his nakedness." (10)

¹⁵ James's indecipherable figures, seen this way, come close to revealing Deleuzian "essences" – the "unity of an immaterial [referentless] sign and of an entirely spiritual meaning [. . .] revealed in the work of art" (40-41). These essences, which Jacques Deleuze identifies with "absolute and ultimate Difference" (in a Proustian, pre-Derridean sense), are themselves sealed arks, in that the novel's characters cannot peer out: "In this regard, Proust is Leibnizian: the essences are veritable monads [. . .] they have neither doors nor windows" (41-42).

¹⁶ The metaphor works well for two other reasons: (1) because Maud becomes a reversed Penelope, weaving a suitor rather than weaving to keep suitors at bay; (2) because she is described as "Britannia of the Market Place." Britannia's figure is derived from Athena, the master weaver, and here Maud is weaving an economic transaction: a good marriage for her handsome niece.

¹⁷ At the same time that Milly becomes a real corpse, the living Kate Croy is becoming a copy of a human being. Her expression of surprise when she finds Lord Mark in front of the portrait with Milly has a secondary meaning, uttered as it is in a room full of paintings: "'You had noticed too?' [. . .] 'Then I'm not original'" (158).

¹⁸ "Everything" and "nothing" saturate the novel. People have everything, tell everything, see everything, and want everything, including wanting to escape everything. All the while, Densher's statement in Book II that "Everything's nothing" tends to apply throughout.

To What Does the Bible Refer? On Metaphor and Analogy

Phil Enns

Introduction

What makes the Bible more than a collection of texts is the belief that the Bible reveals God. It would seem, then, that the answer to the question ‘To what does the Bible refer?’ is ‘God’. However, God is by essence that which we cannot know and therefore cannot say anything about. The answer ‘God’ is, by faith, appropriate, but the focus of the question necessarily shifts from the answer to the question itself and, more precisely, the matter of reference. How can the Bible be about God? The answer requires a consideration of who God is, the character of the Biblical texts, and finally the reader. This paper offers a narrow constructive response focusing on Paul Ricoeur’s work on metaphor and Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of analogy, which together provide robust grounds for understanding both the question and the answer.

Ricoeur: Metaphor and the Names of God

Naming God comes about only within the milieu of a presupposition, incapable of being rendered transparent to itself, suspected of being a vicious circle, and tormented by contingency. This is the presupposition: naming God is what has already taken place in the texts preferred by my listening’s presupposition.¹

For Ricoeur, listening to the Bible presupposes that what is being listened for – that is, God – has already been named by the Bible. There we find a variety of forms of discourse, including narrative and prophetic, that are in different ways about God, so that when the Bible names God, it is not according to a single tone but rather polyphonic.² The narratives provide accounts of God as “Divine Actant” serving as the horizon within a history of deliverance.³

Prophetic discourse establishes God as the ‘voice behind the voice’ who calls and sends. It would seem, however, that acknowledging so many different forms of discourse within the Bible only makes less convincing the claim that the Bible as a whole is about God. If the narrative bits of the Bible refer to God in one way and the prophetic bits in another way, the temptation

is to choose one's favorite discourse as the only legitimate referring one. For example, we might claim that the prophetic form of being called and sent is the primordial encounter with God and serves as the criterion for reading the rest of the Bible. Or we might allow that the various discourses each talk about God in their own unique manner and that the best we can do is simply describe what each is doing. In the first case the referential function of the Bible is identified with only one of its parts, while in the second the referential function is dropped altogether in favor of mere description. Either way, we would no longer be in a position to claim that the Bible is about God.

To say the Bible is about God is to claim that while the word 'God' has different senses there, it always has the same referent. Reference in this case, therefore, requires a relationship between the name 'God' with its various senses and what they are about. According to Ricoeur, "the literary work through the structure proper to it displays a world only under the condition that the reference of descriptive discourse is suspended."⁴ This suspension is grounded in the metaphorical process where the literal or established meanings of words are suspended in order to bring to light new meanings, senses, and, ultimately, references.⁵ For example, the sentence 'My love is a rose' fails to be meaningful when 'rose' is given its ordinary meaning. The one I love is not a flower and thus 'rose' cannot mean what it literally means.

Metaphor, therefore, involves three steps. First, the reader experiences a deviation so that a literal reading fails. Second, she is forced to shift her attention from individual words to the sentence as a whole.⁶ There can be no definition of a word as used in a metaphor because the meaning can only be discerned at the level of the sentence as a whole. Third, the reader herself must work out the meaning of the metaphor. Because there is no established contextual meaning for the words used, she is forced to produce a new contextual meaning.⁷ With the metaphorical process, the literal meaning of language is suspended in favor of a figurative meaning that makes possible ways of seeing the world that extend beyond established contexts.

According to Ricoeur, a similar metaphorical process is at work in the Bible. For example, where the narrative discourse provides an account of traditions and remembrance of founding events, the prophetic discourse warns of an imminent threat.⁸ When these individual discourses are combined in a single text, the Bible, the reader is forced to move beyond the established

meanings that belong properly to the individual discourses in order to produce a unique context within which a new level of meaning is produced. The Bible refers to a God remembered as one who in the past has acted to establish the present community of believers and who presently threatens that very same people. The tension between God's promise and God's threat requires that the reader step away from the individual texts and view the Bible as a whole. It is at this secondary level of meaning that the Bible can refer to God.

The Bible is able to refer because the diversity of discourses comprising the text force the reader to consider a new context, one that begins with the Bible as a whole. However, Ricoeur stresses that as these discourses shift the reader's attention to that context, they also ensure that the reference to God is never complete. The tension between the discourses forces the reference to God to circulate through all of them, never being fixed in any one.⁹ Instead of hindering the reference to God, the diversity is fundamental for the very possibility of the Bible referring to God. Negatively, the tension between discourses makes it impossible for the reader to fix the Biblical reference to God in any particular discourse. Positively, this tension forces her to consider the Bible within a new context where God is named dynamically.

The metaphorical function may open up the possibility for God being named, but what is missing so far is the 'aboutness' that characterizes reference. The question is not whether the Bible can merely *name* God but whether it can *refer to* God. According to Ricoeur, metaphor, through the suspension of the literal or established meaning, allows not only for the possibility of a new sense but also of a new reference.¹⁰ 'My love is a rose' cannot mean what it literally means, yet whatever it does mean depends in some way on what it literally says. Ricoeur calls this the split reference of metaphor.¹¹ My beloved is certainly not a flower, yet there is something about the flower that allows for it to be meaningfully ascribed to my beloved. The metaphor holds within itself an 'is and is not' where the literal reference is suspended in favor of a metaphorical reference. The latter transfers meaning from the original reference into a new realm, so that what is said about the rose is now said metaphorically of my beloved.¹² This transference or metaphorical importation is made possible due to some fittingness or appropriateness between the literal reference and the metaphorical one.¹³ There must be something that makes it appropriate to metaphorically refer to my beloved as

a rose or else the utterance would fail to be meaningful. Through the metaphorical function, then, the original reference is suspended in order to serve as grounds for a transference establishing the new metaphorical reference.

While metaphor simultaneously suspends an established realm in order to open up a new realm within which a new reference is possible, this new one remains figurative and therefore undetermined.

The metaphorical utterance functions in two referential fields at once. This duality explains how two levels of meaning are linked together in the symbol. The first meaning relates to a known field of reference, that is to the sphere of entities to which the predicates considered in their established meaning can be attached. The second meaning, the one that is to be made apparent, relates to a referential field for which there is no direct characterization, for which we consequently are unable to make identifying descriptions by means of appropriate predicates.¹⁴

The metaphorical reference cannot be conceptually fixed into an idea or fact and therefore remains figurative. Yet, if it can take on only a figurative form and thereby lacks any determination, how can we say the metaphor is about something? If it lacks the clarity that comes with concepts and ideas, what does it add to our understanding of the world? Ricoeur responds by arguing that the experience of the fittingness or appropriateness of a metaphor suggests a primordial or pre-objective encounter with the world.¹⁵ There is a world that precedes us, and only because we are responding to it is there something to say.

If language were not fundamentally referential, would or could it be meaningful? How could we know that a sign stands for something, if it did not receive its direction towards something for which it stands from its use in discourse?¹⁶

In possessing a fittingness and appropriateness, the metaphor refers by showing something about the world. According to Ricoeur, once we reject the claim that only the discourse of objects and facts can refer, then we open up greater possibilities of understanding the world. Since the poetic and speculative

discourses refer in their own ways to the same world, the extension of meaning through metaphor makes possible the extension of understanding.¹⁷

For Ricoeur, the Bible opens up a realm within which we can meaningfully talk about God and thereby it refers to God. This reference is not determined by concepts and ideas but instead functions through hints and gestures. By circulating the reference to God through diverse and incommensurable discourses, the Bible ensures that the name ‘God’ is meaningful yet never determined by concepts and ideas. Through the metaphorical function, the one who listens to the Bible engages a world where God is encountered as present and active.

Aquinas: Analogy and the Names of God

For Aquinas it is also true that the Bible refers to God. While particular texts may be about things other than God, they belong in the Bible in so far as they ultimately have their reference to God.¹⁸ Aquinas divides up the senses of the Bible into four: the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.¹⁹ The latter three have their signification through a spiritual sense, in that they signify not by words that signify things but by the things themselves. The Old Law allegorically signifies the New Law, the things done by Christ signify what we are to do as well as things belonging to eternal glory. However, this spiritual sense is grounded in the literal sense to which belong history, etiology, and analogy. History applies to whatever is simply recounted, and etiology to the causes or reasons for what is done. What is noteworthy, however, is that analogy is listed under the literal sense. If we follow the logic of Aquinas’s literal sense, the movement is from event to natural causes to revealed causes. Analogy is, then, the means by which the relationship between the material and divine is articulated.

Aquinas makes it clear that we cannot comprehend God nor have any knowledge of God.²⁰ The temptation is then to say that God is inaccessible to our understanding. But Aquinas rejects this move. Human beings have a natural desire to know why things happen, and as God is the first cause of things, to be unable to understand God would result in this desire being empty. Therefore, something of God must be available to human beings.

From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence

of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence.²¹

When activity is purposeful, the effect depends on the cause, and so from the effect we can derive at least some awareness of the cause.²² Now in the case of God, Aquinas argues that the difference between God as cause and the world as effect is of a kind that we cannot have any knowledge of God, yet from the world as effect we *can* draw two conclusions. First, there is a general awareness that God exists, without this awareness being knowledge. Aquinas uses the example of knowing that someone is approaching but not knowing that it is Peter.²³ The second conclusion is that the effects we see in the world show something of God. We cannot comprehend God nor have any knowledge of God, yet it is possible to know that God exists and to see something of God's essence.

For Aquinas, in every effect something of the cause is to be found, and this likeness can only be thought of according to analogy. Drawing on Aristotle, he gives the following definition of analogy:

Now names are thus used in two ways: either according as many things are proportionate to one, thus for example "healthy" predicated of medicine and urine in relation and in proportion to health of a body, of which the latter is the sign and the former the cause: or according as one thing is proportionate to another, thus "healthy" is said of medicine and animal, since medicine is the cause of health in the animal body. And in this way some things are said of God and creatures analogically, and not in a purely equivocal nor in a purely univocal sense.²⁴

Analogy is comprised of a prior term and a posterior term that relate according to a proportion. This proportion can take two forms. In the first case, various different uses of a word have their meanings determined by a single prior point of reference. Thus the word 'medical' can be said of doctors, surgery, and scalpels. In the second case, only two terms are considered and a word applies to both due to a particular relationship between the two. Here the example is of 'healthy', which is said of medicine as it causes the body to be healthy. Analogy, therefore, allows for a single word to be used in different

ways without its meaning being either univocal or equivocal but, rather, similar.

As we have seen, Aquinas draws on analogy in order to explain how an effect has a likeness to its cause. If God is first cause of all things and there is a similarity between an effect and its cause, then there can be an analogical likeness between effects in the world and God. However, this likeness cannot produce knowledge of God. Aquinas therefore qualifies his use of analogy in two ways. First, human beings by their natural powers cannot see that which is beyond the natural, so an act of grace is necessary.²⁵ God, through the gift of grace, makes it possible for us to see the essence of God by preparing our understanding. This gift of grace does not provide something other than what is given by the intellect but is instead added to the intellect.²⁶ There can thus be no conflict between what is given by reason and what is added through grace. Analogy, in referring to God, provides what cannot be given by natural reason and can be seen only through the activity of grace.

The second qualification is to distinguish two different modes of signification. Since we cannot have any knowledge of God, the meaning of all the terms in the analogy comes from their ordinary use. When we say 'God is good', the meaning of 'good' comes from how it is used in ordinary and established contexts. There is no special meaning to 'good' when it is applied to God. However, the analogy is about God and therefore has God as its referent. The question is, how can words with meanings derived from ordinary usage refer to God? Here Aquinas draws on the two different forms of analogy mentioned above. In the first, a thing is signified by its effects. The example he gives is that of applying the name 'lion' to God.²⁷ The analogy takes its primary meaning from the lion and posits that something similar can be said of God. With this form of analogy, while God is the referent, signification remains primarily with the effects seen in creation, so that any created thing can serve as an analogy of God. With the second form of analogy, a thing is signified by a proportion between two things. There are some terms, like 'good', that are intended to say something substantial about God.

Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him. Now it is shown above that

God prepossesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him, and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling principle of whose form the effects fall short . . . So when we say, 'God is good,' the meaning is not, 'God is the cause of goodness,' or 'God is not evil'; but the meaning is, 'Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God,' and in a more excellent and higher way.²⁸

In dealing with terms that allow for perfection, such as 'good' or 'wise', God is their cause by eminence. The terms signify, not by beginning with how they apply to God and then moving to human beings, but rather from how they are used of human beings and then moving towards God. The goodness of God emanates to God's creation, but the signification of the word 'good' moves in the opposite direction. We can say that God is good, but what is meant by God's goodness lies beyond our understanding. Therefore, the analogy 'God is good' has God as its referent, its meaning from the word 'good' as used of human beings, and its signification by eminence. For Aquinas, while analogy can only draw on words as they are ordinarily used, it is able to signify God through either effects or eminence.

It is now clear why Aquinas places analogy under the literal sense. For him, analogy is not figurative because it can only function within the ordinary, established meanings of words. The statement 'God is love' can only be meaningful if we keep the established meaning of the word 'love'. Yet this statement refers to God when we understand that 'love' as applied to God signifies something higher and more excellent than when applied to human beings. Furthermore, the created order reveals in itself the likeness of its first cause. The lion can represent the strength of God because the literal strength of the lion is an effect of God's creative activity. Analogy is the means by which the Biblical text refers to God by establishing the causal relation between the literal meaning of words and the revelation of God's essence and God as first cause.

Conclusion: Both Metaphor and Analogy

Ricoeur rejects analogy as a means of referring to God largely on the grounds²⁹ that it is incompatible with our modern understanding of the physical universe.³⁰ We can no longer accept any view of causality that extends beyond one event following after another, a position that rules out claiming that an effect has a similarity to its cause. This may be true, but it may also be true that we need a broader understanding of causality, particularly if we want to confess that the Bible refers to God. Ricoeur notes that the Bible refers to God by circulating this reference through the various names of God found in its various discourses. However, this circulating reference can only be possible if the various names of God, in their literal sense, already refer in some way to God. If they didn't, there would be no sense in including them in the cycling of the reference to God.

Yet, according to Ricoeur, reference occurs only when the literal meaning of the names of God is suspended. It is as though he climbs up the ladder of the literal names of God, but upon reaching the top, claims the ladder can be dispensed with. Ricoeur is not completely unaware of this problem, since he insists that metaphors have a fittingness or appropriateness, but he is curiously silent as to what the grounds might be for this similarity. How are the names of God consistent with the historical account of God delivering the Hebrews from Egypt, when the production of these names requires that we suspend claiming this account has any literal meaning regarding God? Given the above, it seems that analogy would account for the fittingness of metaphors, except that Ricoeur rules out this possibility. He can explain how the Bible produces the diverse names we give to God but cannot explain how they are about the God described in the particular discourses comprising the Bible. Thus he undermines his claim that the Bible is about God.

Ricoeur allows that for the Bible to refer to God both metaphor and analogy might be necessary, so that analogy verticalizes metaphor and metaphor gives analogy its concrete form.³¹ If the modern understanding of causality, which is limited to mere succession, were to be rejected for being too narrow, we would feel no need to choose between Ricoeur's account of metaphor and Aquinas's account of analogy. Analogy allows for the Bible to be about God while metaphor provides the content. To believe that the Biblical text refers to God, and that therefore God has already been named, requires

that as listeners we must attend to both what is literally said and how this is then about God. As Aquinas tells us, when the Bible is talking about the essence of God, what is said of human beings is found in God in a more perfect and higher way. When the Bible is talking about the created order, God is revealed but in a metaphorical sense. As human beings we begin with what is given to us through literal and established means, but as Christians we believe that what is given also reveals God. The faithful reader is called to attend to the Biblical text because the Bible, with its literal and spiritual senses, is about God, and therefore God has already been named in it.

Notes

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," in *Figuring the Sacred*, ed. Mark Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 218.

² *Ibid.*, 224.

³ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 221.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸ Ricoeur, "Naming God," 226.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 221.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹² *Ibid.*, 238.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 21.

¹⁷ Ricoeur fixes interpretation as the means by which the semantic content of poetic discourse is brought to speculative discourse. Interpretation, through schematizations and imaginative illustrations, produces the concepts and ideas which make understanding possible. Instead of being in conflict, poetic and speculative discourses engage in a symbiotic relationship where the poetic extends the field of meaning while the speculative provides understanding through determination within that field of meaning.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981, c1948), I, Q1, a7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, Q1, a10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, Q12, a1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, Q2, a2.

²² For more on the importance of purposefulness in Aquinas, see John Milbank, "Intensities," *Modern Theology* 15 (October 1999).

²³ Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q2, a1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, Q13, a5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, Q12, a5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, Q1, a8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, Q13, a6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, Q13, a2.

²⁹ Ricoeur makes clear that his objection lies solely at the physical level. He does not want to deny the validity of the attempt to find an adequate way of referring to God that belongs to speculative rather than poetic discourse. There is a rather ironic tension in his thought. In developing his account of metaphor, he rejects the suggestion that scientific discourse constrains the referential function of metaphor. But when it comes to analogy, scientific discourse proves to be the undoing of Aquinas's account of analogy. A more consistent position would be to distinguish between scientific and speculative discourse, and to allow that speculative discourse must not be constrained by scientific discourse. That Ricoeur fails to do this is surprising, given his Kantianism.

³⁰ Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 277.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

Reading the Moral Law: A Hermeneutical Approach to Religious Moral Epistemology

David Kratz Mathies

I

The ancient Daoist writer Zhuangzi asks the very pertinent (and contemporary) question, ‘If you and I have a dispute, whom shall we get to adjudicate it?’ He notes that if the judge agrees beforehand with either disputant, the judgment is inherently unjust, but if the judge agrees with neither disputant or has no opinion, what, he asks, could such a judge say that would not ultimately be arbitrary? He concludes that ‘neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other’.¹ From the issues of universal human rights to the possibility of cultural imperialism by missionaries, from the challenges posed by religious pluralism to the debates between globalization’s proponents and detractors, the question of perspective is decidedly crucial to contemporary moral discourse. As the argument from Zhuangzi, or the Socratic dispute with the early Sophists, or the Jains’ elaborate seven-fold predication² all make abundantly clear, this is neither a new problem nor a simple one.

As with ethics, so also with interpretation: the central question is that of making judgments. Our responsibility in making judgments is to do so with grounds, in a way that we can defend to others and in a manner that scrupulously avoids the arbitrary. Rightness, in the sense of correctness and moral approbation, is thus inextricably linked to reason-giving. Whether the justification comes from ‘pure reason’, observations, textual evidence, inspiration, intuition, or tradition, this link is crucial to our analysis of the role of religious texts in the common project of moral enquiry.

In every religious tradition, one significant problem in the interpretation of the respective religious texts has always been their application to everyday ethical decisions. Our Christian tradition is no exception in following the typical pattern of conservative, orthodox interpretations vying for legitimacy with liberal, innovative ones. But the reality is not as simple as that perception, and the application of religious text to moral law is not simple either.

The most contentious moral issue within the Mennonite Church today is arguably the set of problems posed by homosexuality. Conservatives are right in principle in calling for us to be faithful to the biblical witness, and in

highlighting the need for membership standards and mutual admonition. They correctly point out that tolerance and acceptance of persons should not be extended to mean endorsing sinful behavior. Liberals (who are generally more comfortable talking about justice than sin) are likewise correct in asking for consistent application of biblical principles such as that of compassion. Both sides are correct in assuming that (for good or ill) the origins of homosexuality in persons and the observed behavior of homosexuals in society are vitally important to the overall moral argument.

It is my intention to stand firmly in line with the Anabaptist tradition that the Bible must be taken seriously for the guidance of our daily lives. But the familiar liberal/conservative dichotomy is here neither helpful nor accurate. It is important to be faithful to the biblical witness and to be alive to the reality of change and the possibility of progress. But the conservative myth of a pristine time of untainted understanding and application of morality to which we must either cling or return, as well as the liberal myth of universal understanding and timeless principles towards which we must strive, are both impugned by the realization that no understanding is devoid of perspective, no application is apart from context. There can be no 'pure' reading of the Bible from which liberals are dragging us away, nor is there 'pure' reason which conservatives are merely too parochial to see. We inevitably bring our biases (cultural, religious, ideological, and even personal) to our interpretation, and our principles must necessarily be applied to particular circumstances.

Both liberal and conservative perspectives ignore their inherent biases and the past and present uses of their standards as tools of oppression. The naïve primacy given to the biblical text ignores the historical proclivity for the Bible to serve as the tool of choice for justifying patriarchy, slavery, misogyny, colonialism, anti-Semitism, and violent conquest. This most obviously occurs when prooftexts are quoted whose interpretation and application may not be questioned. But the innocence of reason has likewise been indicted by critiques from Nietzsche forward and perhaps best laid forth by Alasdair MacIntyre in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*³ Since the Enlightenment, Western liberal reason has been and continues to be a culturally-bound, largely secular, framework, which can itself be an oppressive imposition on others, whether located in another tradition or even among the more religious-minded of our own culture. Both biases equally ignore the inevitable circularity of argument that naturally follows from their exclusive, uncritical application.

The problem with circularity of argument ('begging the question') is that an argument purports to prove something given the truth of certain premises. If those premises themselves depend upon the truth of the conclusion, nothing is properly established. Similarly, if an argument begins with an arbitrary premise, the conclusion may well (even validly) follow, but it depends ultimately on the truth of certain unproven (because arbitrarily chosen) premises. Likewise, establishing the truth of a culturally-dependent claim, based upon and within the framework of a culturally-dependent understanding, may ultimately be arbitrarily based upon circular reasoning. Judging (whether moral or interpretive) involves reason-giving; reason-giving involves values and rules of inference. These in turn not only differ across traditions but are inherently, in principle, impossible to establish absolutely. This is 'vicious' circularity, which opens the door to relativism or even 'indifferentism'.

II

I came initially to the question of hermeneutics troubled by the implications of diverse biblical interpretations for our Anabaptist peace witness. That so many sincere Christians could deny the interpretation that so plainly could be read in the New Testament was not new to me. But that the reading we gave to the whole of the Bible depended on our emphasis on select parts – whose selection in turn depended on our religious upbringing – raised critical questions about the arbitrariness of our Mennonite interpretation. The most basic and original understanding of the hermeneutic circle describes a continuous movement from part to whole and back to part: Our understanding of a section adds to our understanding of the whole, but this in turn gives context and deeper understanding to each part. If such arbitrary factors as our culture, religion of birth, and personal tastes could predetermine how we enter into this cycle of understanding, then there would ultimately be no reason we could give to outsiders that would carry legitimate (*rational*) weight. Not only would our understanding of Jesus' gospel of peace seem irrelevant to the realities of the world (a conclusion grounded in our post-Schleithem, Two Kingdoms theology), but the subsequently private, parochial ethic of nonresistance would reduce us to a relativism seemingly incompatible with the notion of witness or gospel as universal good news.

We can take hope, however, from observing that we do in fact make judgments that seem to work in various rather successful ways. We

communicate, rightly understanding each other; we interpret texts, often with surprisingly broad agreement; we argue with one another, sometimes convincing the other, but generally understanding the reasons given; and we make moral judgments that may not be agreed to across all cultures but are generally comprehensible when properly explained.

Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*⁴ argues that we always *and necessarily* bring our prejudices (fore-understandings) to every act of understanding. These biases are actually constitutive of our possibility for understanding. To borrow Thomas Kuhn's famous term, they make up our paradigms. There is thus no possibility of radical doubt of the Cartesian variety, where we wipe our cognitive slate clean in order to skeptically evaluate everything from scratch and reintroduce only truths that can be established with clear and distinct certitude. In Gadamer's view, though our beginning point may be arbitrary, our result, as we interact with the object of our understanding, whether a literary text or a work of art, will not be. Although we begin with our pre-established biases, each pass in the circle involves learning as we interact with the object in such a way that we come to understand. Gadamer refers here to a 'fusion of horizons', which involves expanding our own horizon of understanding by incorporating that of the other. Even the very fore-understandings we bring to the encounter can ultimately be questioned when we are 'pulled up short' by a failure of our beliefs.⁵

This corrective feature of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy bears striking resemblance to aspects of American pragmatism, especially the thought of C.S. Pierce,⁶ subsequently developed by W.V.O. Quine and J.S. Ullian in *Web of Belief*.⁷ On this pragmatic theory of justification, our beliefs cohere in a web of interdependency. Unlike Cartesian foundationalism, there are no basic beliefs. Rather, they mutually depend on vast networks of justifications. When one belief fails, that calls into question all the beliefs that depended upon it, as well as those that had originally justified it. Revising the error in a web, however, does not require starting from scratch and radically doubting the entire (vertical) edifice, but only doubting and revising those beliefs affected. On this view, those revisions are naturally best that least alter the overall belief set. This model arguably reflects how we learn and draw everyday conclusions, as well as describing the fact of progress (contra Kuhn) found in 'the scientific method'.

In a manner similar to the hermeneutic circle, particular observations provide evidence (via induction) for our general principles that in turn help to explain particulars. There is no vicious circularity, however, because all our beliefs are interconnected and not dependent in simple straight-line chains to a single basic belief for each set. Instead, they mutually reinforce and corroborate. As Jeffrey Olen explains, ‘Our webs are not constructed like big circles. They are, rather, vast and intricate criss-crossing networks, which are designed to accommodate the fullest range of experience in the best possible way. If our webs succeed in this task, it is no fatal flaw that there are no self-justifying beliefs.’⁸

Thus, whether on the hermeneutical or pragmatic view, we ultimately avoid relativism because even arbitrary beginnings are corrigible based on testing against reality. Moreover, since there is no single foundation upon which everything rests, any and every single belief is open to testing and appropriate revision where called for by either evidence or inconsistency. If our starting point is arbitrary, it does not lock us into error until we overhaul our foundations. Cartesian radical doubt is not a human possibility. We think in paradigms and conceptual frameworks, and we can only question those fore-understandings as we become aware of them – when, for instance, our Heideggerian hammer breaks, when we are ‘pulled up short’ by a mistaken belief, when we have too many epicycles for our astronomical model, or when our interpretive principle fails to make sense of a text.

Joel Weinsheimer points to Gadamer’s claim that the hermeneutic circle is constantly expanding in the progress of greater understanding, and uses this image to coin a new metaphor—the hermeneutic spiral—to illustrate how directional movement is effected despite the repeated circular motion of the interaction.⁹ The possibility of expansion is theoretically afforded by confrontation with the object. In literary interpretation, this is the text; in art, the physical work; in science, some selective aspect of reality. My own proposal is to characterize the common project of moral enquiry as one confronting the reality of the moral law.¹⁰

III

Discussion of how we might have access to the abstract object I am calling ‘the moral law’ unfortunately lies outside the scope of this paper. It must suffice here to say that as Christians we must presume we have that ability,

however vague it might be. Not only does the justice of God entail that moral obligations must be knowable (see, for example, Romans 2: 15, where Paul makes reference to the moral law written on all hearts),¹¹ but the *imago Dei* is arguably located in our ability to choose right from wrong, an ability first gained by Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:22).¹²

Our moral obligations cannot be ascertained simply by reading the Bible or any other religious text. The object of our moral enquiry must necessarily lie beyond the simple confrontation with the Bible as text to be read and understood. Not only can texts not interpret themselves, but principles cannot apply themselves. And part of the moral task must involve the appropriate application of moral principles to actual, contextual situations. Nancey Murphy demonstrates how the enterprise of theology can be characterized by the scientific method, complete with projects, core hypotheses, testing, and even objectively discerned progress.¹³ Using the overlapping conceptual resources of philosophical hermeneutics and pragmatic epistemology, I intend much the same path for our moral enquiry. Murphy, however, develops her case without recourse to an object of understanding. But without the object, what is that progress towards? If there are real moral obligations, then there are true moral truth claims. If there are such truth claims, we can treat them as valid objects of our understanding and develop an epistemology of moral truths.

I am not advocating a return to the misguided notion of natural law. Even at its best and most sophisticated, natural law thinking cannot escape the problem of circularity. Nor am I proposing a corpus of moral truths devoid of contextual modifiers. As Brevard Childs notes, ‘One of the hallmarks of the modern study of the Bible . . . is the recognition of the time-conditioned quality of both the form and the content of Scripture. A pre-critical method which could feel free simply to translate every statement of the Bible into a principle of right doctrine is no longer possible.’¹⁴

Such a simple translation scheme would falter immediately on much more practical grounds: the inadequacy of Scripture to the task. First, even if we accept the unequivocal normative authority of the Bible as a moral guide, the biblical witness itself is not univocal. On even the simplest reading, contradictions and inconsistencies are evident, even on practical matters of guidance for our daily lives. For example, why did Jesus ask the disciples to buy swords (Luke 22:36), if peace, love, compassion, and mercy are the salient virtues of his ethical teachings? Perhaps more important, how do we

deal with the violence of the Hebrew Bible if Jesus himself claimed not to be abrogating the law of the prophets (Matt. 5:17-18)?¹⁵

The early Anabaptist Hans Denck compiled a list of forty pairs of Bible verses that form apparent contradictions which may only be reconciled upon adopting a higher viewpoint in order to make a higher-order interpretation.¹⁶ This process of stepping back is required whenever we are confronted with two equally relevant claims that may only admit of adjudication from a standpoint outside. This new standpoint is necessary in order to apply criteria not internal to the two claims. This recalls the conundrum of Zhuangzi at the start of this discussion. There is also a significant parallel here to the work of ethical theorist W.D. Ross, who could not characterize a principled methodology of deciding among competing *prima facie* duties.¹⁷

The process of stepping back to consider the internal relation of various textual pieces immediately and in principle requires an extratextual perspective. This might involve reasons to favor one text over another or some new interpretative principle, drawn perhaps from other selections, allowing opposing texts to be made compatible and assimilated into the whole interpretive picture. The Radical Reformers engaged in heated debates about the relative weight of the Old and New Testaments, and some of the early Anabaptists accused the magisterial reformers of adopting, as Hans-Jürgen Goertz says, “a selective approach to the Bible, arguing that they were ‘wrecking’ it, applying only those passages which suited their own designs.”¹⁸

Various touchstones have thus been offered through the millennia for ensuring correct interpretation of Scripture. Walter Klaassen notes,

As time went on Anabaptists as well as others became more and more aware of the problems which arose wherever the Scriptures were regarded as the sole authority. Which of the many possible interpretations was the correct one and by which marks could one identify it? The established churches could simply enforce their interpretations without explaining. Among Anabaptists one could insist that one had the only valid interpretation and, if possible, excommunicate those who disagreed. But some writers were more perceptive and began to identify marks by which interpretations could be checked for accuracy. Bernhard Rothmann said quite simply that an interpretation is reliable if it leads to behaviour that

conforms to Christ. If such behaviour is not there, Scripture has not been understood.¹⁹

On first blush, this particular touchstone fits nicely with Jesus' own admonition to judge by the fruits of the Spirit (Matt. 7:15-20). But again the problem with this and all other such touchstones is that of their origins and the framework used in their application. As already noted, our predilections for choosing interpretive principles cannot themselves originate solely from the text. We inescapably bring biases to our reading. Indeed, there is even no possibility of a 'simple' reading that does not involve an entire complex of fore-understandings.

IV

The difficulty appears yet more starkly when we return to consider Hans Denck and his contradictions. He, like many others, determined that such difficulties with a simple interpretation of Scripture merely illustrated the necessity for the intervention and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to make clear what is not humanly clear. However, the application of Spirit as touchstone simply removes the issue to one more level. Those appealing to the Spirit's authority as a measure of correct interpretation must demonstrate another process of stepping back to justify their claims with extra-traditional criteria. Notice, however, that appealing to revelation obviates neither the possibility nor the responsibility of further dialogue. As Francis Clooney contends, '[A]ppealing to revelation need not entail abandoning reason. Theologians give reasons even for their appeals to revelation, argue that it is reasonable to give priority to revelation, and strive to have revelation harmoniously guide reasoning in its method and agenda.'²⁰

The second major difficulty, that of application, is complicated because the moral law is distinctly underdetermined by the biblical evidence. Scriptural moral admonitions are simply not comprehensive. Issues of global warming or even abortion are never explicitly addressed in the biblical record. And where would one look for the answer to that most pressing of American moral questions: 'How would Jesus vote?' More concretely, moral claims made against the consumption of alcohol cannot appeal directly to the Bible, where Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), and where we are instructed to remember his sacrifice through breaking bread

and sharing the cup. Such a prohibition must rely rather on a general moral principle of holy living combined with morally relevant facts. In this example, these facts would include knowledge about modern American culture, including the prevalence of alcoholism, problems concerning road safety, connections with child and spouse abuse, all combined with an immoral commercialism that is generally sexist and encourages over-consumption.

Again, on Gadamer's view, the arbitrariness of our perspective is not a liability, since our perspective is our only ground for the possibility of understanding. Still, a consequence of this view is that progress and learning are only possible through the incremental revision of our biases as we become aware of their individual failures. Our perspective should not, therefore, be lent undue legitimation but rather be held tentatively, as our current best framework for understanding. A hermeneutical approach such as I am proposing will thus involve what Clooney calls 'dialogical testing,' whose hallmarks include tentative conclusions and openness to revision and correction.²¹ Clooney writes, 'The theologian who puts forward theological arguments seriously is also seriously proposing that his or her beliefs are reasonable. In turn, it is this serious reasonability that saves the beliefs from a splendid isolation in which they are immune to the questions and critiques of outsiders.'²² The price of engagement, to have our voice heard, is necessarily the vulnerability of hearing others' voices.

What guarantee is there that such 'progress' of our understanding will in fact be an accurate reading of the moral law? Though our perceptions will always be colored by our cognitive framework (therefore, no strict guarantee), there are some tentative principles that a hermeneutical approach can suggest to our moral epistemology. Sin must be evaluated with the humility suggested by Jesus' remarks on judging (Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-42) and throwing the first stone (John 8:1-11).²³ Justice must be determined in the light of Jesus' life example: in the cross, in service to others, in speaking truth to power.²⁴ Are these, however, not merely new touchstones that are likewise culturally determined? Perhaps. Childs is right to claim there can be no single hermeneutical key for interpretation.²⁵ It seems, though, that whether we take the insights to be garnered from postmodernism, the feminist critique, Nietzsche's will-to-power, or a Christian theology of human fallenness, the primary distortion of our reading and our reason derives from self-promotion and the misuse of power. But these tentative, hermeneutical principles themselves involve the openness, epistemic modesty, and non-assertiveness

of one's own interests that are inherently conducive to a reading which is both confessional and corrigible.

By way of contrast, Goertz highlights the relevance of power to interpretation, in the context of the early Anabaptists:

The Zurich Anabaptists had originally learned to read the Bible with the eyes of people who were forced to watch impotently while their hopes for a fundamental reform of Christianity came to nothing. In their powerlessness they recognised, through their own approach to Scripture, the extent to which the reformers were still using it as an instrument of their authority and rule, in order to triumph in the sphere of church politics. Obviously the Anabaptists' new experience with the Scriptures was not so lasting that it precluded their successors from themselves using Scripture as an instrument of power in their own congregations in later years.²⁶

My suggestion is ultimately not as radical as it may at first seem. Part of my contention is that the hermeneutical process (and the pragmatic theory of justification) actually characterize the way we do in fact learn, communicate, argue, and make judgments. A further part of this claim is thus that we are already involved in a hermeneutical process through ongoing comparative study, interfaith dialogue, and everyday moral debates. Yet openness to the reasoned critique of another perspective (even other religious and philosophical voices) must not be viewed as relativism. Rather, treating the moral law as a 'text' requires seeing it as an accessible object, thus undermining the privilege of a community narrative. At the same time, construing the moral enquiry as a hermeneutical process delegitimizes the liberal conceit of timeless, universal truth devoid of contextual modifiers. The relative novelty in my claim is thus that the only faithful reading of the Bible comes from our engagement with the world. The only real grounds we have for truth lie in the dual dialogical mode of speaking with conviction and listening with empathy.

Notes

¹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia, 1968), 48.

² For a discussion of this and other relevant Jain doctrines, see Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism* (Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1981).

³ (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1988). This comment ought not to be construed as an endorsement of his overall project.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998).

⁵ *Ibid.*, especially 265-71.

⁶ For a very brief description of Pierce's views, see Jeffrey Olen, *Persons and Their World: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 281-82.

⁷ (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 309.

⁹ *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale, 1985), 40.

¹⁰ Though I remain skeptical of his conclusions, the concrete intent of my proposal is roughly parallel to what Paul Knitter calls a 'two-source approach.' See *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 91-92.

¹¹ On the closely related (and extremely relevant) issue of special and general revelation, see the brief treatment by Knitter, 98-99.

¹² This is actually an example of intertextual difficulties. The current view of contemporary commentators notwithstanding (see, for example, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 63), my reading of the two texts is as follows: Though the term 'image of God' originates from the earlier creation narrative (Gen. 1:27) where God created male and female in God's own image, the creation of Eve is recounted later (Gen. 2:22) and it is immediately after they have eaten the forbidden fruit that God says (in the NIV) 'The man has *now* become like one of us, knowing good and evil' (Gen. 3:22; emphasis added). Apart from treating, as many theologians have done to resolve this problem, image and likeness as two separate descriptors (see Wenham, 29-32), there is no simple reading of these passages. Regardless of the timing, however, if God created us as capable knowers with free will, I would argue that the ability to discern good from evil continues as a requisite correlate to those attributes.

¹³ *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1993).

¹⁴ *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 13.

¹⁵ Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. concludes that Scripture is open to a spectrum of faithful interpretations on this point (*To Liberate and Redeem: Moral Reflections on the Biblical Narrative* [Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1997], 162-68). This stance does not, however, derive from any theoretical issue of interpretation, as evidenced by the more definitive claim that he offers by way of contrast: 'I am not sure there is equal latitude about according women an equal role in the life and leadership of the church' (167).

¹⁶ Ludwig Keller, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer* (Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1882), 70ff. Keller notes that Denck 'stellt . . . achtzig Bibelstellen – „Gegenschriften“ wie er sagt – zusammen, die aus höheren Gesichtspunkten vereinigt werden müssen.'

¹⁷ *The Right and the Good* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988).

¹⁸ *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1996), 53.

¹⁹ *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1981), 141.

²⁰ *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 129.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 91.

²³ See, for example, Long, *To Liberate and Redeem*, 160-61.

²⁴ See, for example, Knitter on the testing through *praxis* that he calls 'ethical hermeneutics': *No Other Name*, 163ff.

²⁵ Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 15.

²⁶ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 50.

Origen on the Authorial Intention of Scripture

Jeremy M. Bergen

Scholars, preachers, and others have increasingly recognized that historical-critical approaches to the Bible have often failed to train the ear to hear the text as the living Word of God.¹ Historical biblical criticism has typically attempted to uncover the intention of the human author, whereby what the historical Amos or Paul meant in their context defines the singular meaning of the text.² This has led to the reconstruction of traditions behind the canonical text, the sifting of what Amos himself may have said from what a later editor may have added, and reduction of the Bible to discrete texts reflecting the diverse views of their authors absent an overarching unity.³ Underlying and reinforcing historical-critical methods is the assumption of a *qualitative* historical distance between the story narrated by the text and our present world.⁴ Among other results, these methods demand expertise in ancient languages and cultures to bridge the distance and uncover the single, objective meaning intended by the author; biblical authority stands or falls on the success of this enterprise.

Critics of historical-critical interpretation recognize the many benefits these methods have yielded and recommend consulting them on an ad hoc basis.⁵ Nevertheless, given that the reconstruction of ancient cultures or ancient texts does not vouch for the authority of Scripture in the church, scholars have taken a step back to ask just what Scripture is and how it fits into the economy of salvation. What is needed is an account of the unity within the text, and the unity among the world immediately depicted by the text and us. Such an account must be theological if the Bible is to function authoritatively for the church.

Among three recent examples, Telford Work offers “a fully Trinitarian account of Scripture, establishing and exploring its divine and human character and its salvific purpose in its Church setting and beyond.”⁶ He develops a Christological analogy with respect to Scripture: it is a fully human and a fully divine reality united for the sake of our salvation. Stephen E. Fowl is interested in how the formation of personal, ecclesial, and pneumatological interpretive

practices emerge from Scripture and in turn condition the reading of it,⁷ while John Webster develops a sustained account of Holy Scripture

in terms of its role in God's self-communication, that is, the acts of Father, Son and Spirit which establish and maintain that saving fellowship with humankind in which God makes himself known to us and by us. The 'sanctification' of Scripture (its 'holiness') and its 'inspiration' (its proceeding from God) are aspects of the process whereby God employs creaturely reality in his service. . . .⁸

The constructive interests of Work, Fowl, and Webster are rooted in a long tradition. The theological interpretation of Scripture has sought guidance from pre-critical (patristic, medieval, reformational) exegesis that recognized multiple levels of meaning in the text. In this paper I turn to the exegetical writings of the third-century Christian teacher Origen, who taught that God was the author of Scripture and that this authorial intention determines what Scripture is, its unity, and its function. However, the reading proper to the text is anything but literalistic or mechanistic; rather it leads to layers of meaning.

According to John 13:4, Jesus "put aside his garments" before washing his disciples' feet. Origen comments that just as Jesus was clothed with cloth garments, so the eternal Word, or Logos, was clothed with flesh (*CJn* 32.4.44).⁹ The adornment of the Word made flesh in part consists of "a fabric of passages joined with passages and sounds joined with sounds" (*CJn* 32.4.45). As the Word is clothed with flesh in Jesus, so the Word is clothed in passages and sounds in the form of Scripture. The humbling act of footwashing represents God's accommodation to the human condition, either as Jesus Christ or as Scripture, for the purpose of salvation. However, to the modern historical-critical reader, the human author of the Fourth Gospel was simply reporting the event of the footwashing when he wrote that Jesus "put aside his garments." Surely that author did not *intend* to be saying something about the nature of Scripture and its relationship to the incarnation. Origen here exhibits the multi-faceted allegorical, or spiritual, interpretation that is famously or infamously associated with his name.

Allegory, God, and the Human Soul

Origen (ca.185-250) contends there are two main senses of Scripture – the literal or historical and the spiritual or allegorical.¹⁰ According to Karen J.

Torjesen, "The exposition of the historical sense seeks to clarify, rationalize and elaborate the historical situation referred to in the text. The allegorical or spiritual sense seeks to explain the meaning of the historical situation in terms of the soul, the spiritual life and the church."¹¹

Allegorical interpretation has been criticized for centuries. Recently, R.P.C. Hanson charged that Origen reduces history to a mere "charade for showing forth eternal truths about God." Origen's method denies the possibility that history is "the place where through tension and uncertainty and danger and faith [human beings] encounter God as active towards them."¹² However, the category of history as it figures in Origen's interpretation of Scripture is neither neglected nor a mere cipher; rather it is recast in a broader theological context in light of the specific intention of the true author and of a plausible object of that author: the progress of the soul. Origen certainly assumes the events recorded in Scripture actually happened; however, his interest as an interpreter is not primarily in history but in the description of the necessarily temporal and material conditions under which the triune God provides Scripture as a way for *present* fallen temporal and material souls to return to God. For soteriological reasons, Origen wants to show how the temporal framework depicted in Scripture is *our* time. History *per se* is the site of God's activity for us.

Brief comments about Origen's doctrines of the Trinity, the soul, and salvation are in order here. The persons of the Trinity have different kinds of jurisdictions and missions in creation and redemption. The Father is the source of all things that have existence. Christ, however, is what makes certain beings rational (*OFP* 1.3.8). The eternal Son is the image of God, variously described as God's Wisdom or Word, the Logos, rational principle, meaning and intelligibility proceeding from God's goodness. The Logos assumed human nature in Jesus Christ to fulfill its purpose as saving mediator between God and creatures (*OFP* 2.6.1). That the rational principle permeating creation is Jesus Christ means that God has provided appropriate means for all beings to achieve their appointed ends. Significantly for us, the capacity of some beings for rationality gives them the ability to make moral choices. While the Logos is all truth however encountered, the Holy Spirit dwells in souls that live virtuously according to this truth and thus participate intimately in the Logos. Whereas sinners can have existence and rationality, the Holy Spirit is the grace of holiness particular to the Christian life and necessary for a true share in God (*OFP* 1.3.6-8). Humans start their spiritual ascent with the Holy

Spirit through growth in holiness and virtue, grasp the rational principles of the world in the Son, and then contemplate the Father as the source of all things. From Father to Son to Spirit, the jurisdictions of the persons are increasingly specific, and in that sense there is a subordinationism in God.¹³ But the three are together one essence and one God, and are exclusively incorporeal. God has no body.

Everything that is not God has a body. Souls are rational/spiritual bodies that have “cooled” in relation to God and have been lodged in the material world from which they are to ascend to God. The progress of the soul is from the corruptible physical body to the incorruptible spiritual body of the resurrection, and thus requires knowledge of the Logos and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well

In John 4:1-26 Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. At the outset of his *Commentary on John*, Origen says the woman represents “the heterodox when they study the divine Scriptures” (*CJn* 13.1.6). The well may represent Scripture and water the kind of interpretation. The water coming from Jacob’s well is that which assuages physical thirst and satisfies temporarily. Jesus tells the woman that whoever receives living water has inside herself a well-spring leaping to eternal life (*CJn* 13.3.14). Whoever drinks from Jacob’s well grasps only a part of the Scriptures, but whoever partakes of the water Jesus gives has the whole of Scripture. Jesus converses with the woman in order to draw out from her a request for living water, since asking for a divine gift reflects the turn of the will from lower to more spiritual things (*CJn* 13.1.5). That she was physically thirsting is an important first step, for such desire put her in a position to encounter Jesus and to see the benefits of having a “well-spring” (of interpretive capacity) within herself.

Jesus says to the woman, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman responds, ‘I do not have a husband.’ Jesus says, ‘You have said well “I have no husband,” for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.’ Origen explains that whatever law of interpretation one uses may be called that soul’s “husband,” since a law of interpretation rules the soul as a husband rules a wife (*CJn* 13.8.43). The five husbands may represent the five senses, which denote a law of interpretation according

to physical senses (*CJn* 13.9.51). The death of these husbands means that interpretation according to the letter and senses alone has passed away. The sixth, who is not truly a husband at all, is a false method of spiritual interpretation. This sixth husband is Gnostic exegesis, which regarded the law according to the letter and the whole material world as evil rather than a shadow of future good things (*CJn* 13.10.61).

For Origen, interpretation by means of the senses is a positive first step, and this distinguishes him from the Gnostics. The water of Jacob precedes and creates the desire for the water of Jesus. The woman is evidently on a path of spiritual progress because she recognizes that her current “husband” represents a wrong way of interpreting and thus is no husband at all. Because of the physical water – interpretation according to the senses – she moves to a higher level and begins to recognize she is speaking with the Logos clothed in flesh.

We should note the conjectural quality of the interpretations Origen proffers. He does not demand that readers accept iron-clad correspondences, as if five husbands *must* mean five senses and nothing else. Rather, he suggests a web of meanings in which the spiritual person may recognize the truth and find edification. In his exegetical and systematic writings alike, Origen frequently commends possible interpretations or arguments to the reader’s judgment.

Jesus explains what his life-giving water consists of and how he is its source. He tells the woman the time is coming when the worship of God will not be circumscribed to a particular physical place like Mt. Gerizim or Jerusalem. Rather, “God is spirit, and those worshiping him must worship him in spirit and truth.” Origen explains what it means to say God is light, fire, and spirit (*CJn* 13.21.124). These are not speculative assertions but clues to *how* human souls in bodies may move towards God. God as light refers to God’s illumination of the mind (*CJn* 13.23.136). God cannot be truly known with the physical senses because God is not visible. Instead, the soul’s affinity with God is in the realm of the intelligible. As Mark Edwards writes, “[O]ur nature is such that it cannot apprehend the word of God without a conversion of the intellect: to know is to be changed and thus to be morally united with the known.”¹⁴ God as spirit refers to the eternal life that God’s life-giving spirit shares with those united to God. Christ is the source of this life for us, because the mission of the Logos is to dwell among the people in order to lift their eyes to spirit (*CJn* 13.24.146). As fire, God is the power that consumes our vices and passions tying us to

the materiality that blinds us to the spiritual wisdom that God is (*OFP* 1.1.2; *CJn* 13.23.139). Moral formation is a condition for spiritual interpretation because the same movement from the material to the spiritual is operative in each.

On two levels, the theme of Origen's commentary is the interpretation of Scripture. At the level of the historical event, Jesus identifies himself as the Logos by presenting himself as the key to unlocking the full truth in Scripture. At a spiritual level, the story is applied to the progress of the soul. It is Scripture, the Logos clothed in passages and sounds, not in flesh, that brings the soul to realize that in spiritual interpretation of Scripture, the soul encounters the Logos and thus participates in a God who is light, spirit, and fire. Origen applies a spiritual interpretation to a passage that he claims is historically and literally about spiritual interpretation. The soul who truly interprets John 4 relives the encounter with Jesus by performing the very interpretation Jesus is talking about. The contemporary reader of the Gospel of John (and Origen's commentary) learns that her own reading is the subject of the text. In this encounter with the text, she is as present to Christ as was the woman at the well.

Yet the story of the Samaritan woman is not *only* an allegory for spiritual interpretation of Scripture. Origen writes, "I think that, in relation to knowledge as a whole, the Scriptures as a whole are to be understood as most meager elements and the briefest introductions, even when they are understood accurately" (*CJn* 13.5.30). Scripture does not contain all truth, and even understood rightly is as meager as Jacob's water compared with Jesus' eternal water. For what larger process is Scripture merely an introduction? For Origen, it is the spiritual progress of soul, which entails but is not exhausted by the reading of Scripture. Thus, John 4 may not be only about the exegesis of Scripture but about the formation of a soul that can make a certain kind of use of Scripture.

What Scripture trains us to do is to see spiritually. Furthermore, the introductory nature of Scripture may also be accounted for in terms of a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Son, or Logos. While the Logos is itself all truth, the Spirit makes this truth accessible by clothing it in words and passages. The habits and virtues required for a spiritual reading are imparted by the Spirit to those whose holy lives make their souls a dwelling place for the Spirit. The Spirit uses Scripture to bring us face to face with the Logos – Jesus Christ.

The Footwashing of the Disciples

Origen's commentary on Jesus' footwashing in John 13:1-15 shows just how different his conception of the historical sense of Scripture is from a common contemporary one. It also illustrates how the Holy Spirit prepares for, guides, and perpetuates spiritual interpretation. Origen explains that Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is a cleansing of their sins; the dust on the feet represents worldly sins.

Peter virtually rebukes Jesus when he tells Jesus not to wash his feet. Jesus replies, "What I am doing you are not aware of now, but later on you shall know," and "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." How can Peter, the first of the apostles, appear the least knowledgeable of all? This presents an example of what Origen elsewhere describes as a "stumbling block" in Scripture (*OFP* 4.2.9). The Holy Spirit often conceals truth under surface meaning in order to train the reader to seek out the spiritual meaning. Origen writes, "Divine things are communicated to [human beings] somewhat obscurely and are the more hidden in proportion to the unbelief or unworthiness of the inquirer." The unworthy reader may propose a literal interpretation that leads to error. Incongruities are inserted into the text "in order that the very interruption of the narrative might as it were present a barrier to the reader and lead him to refuse to proceed along the pathway of ordinary meaning" (*OFP* 4.2.9). But the treasure the Spirit has buried in the text can be unearthed by the grace of the same Spirit who shapes the disposition of the *searching* reader.

In Origen's account, Peter's ostensible ignorance is evidence of his growth in virtue. By the end of the story, the lesson Peter learns is about the shape of the Logos' pedagogical mission. Peter acted impetuously in the past, but "since he was aware of how impulsive he had been earlier, he derived the greatest benefit, becoming the most steadfast and patient" (*CJn* 32.5.61). Peter's censure of Jesus' desire to wash his feet thus reflects good intentions and the reverence of a student for his teacher. While Peter's undisputed holiness and virtue prepared him to receive the Logos, he did not yet see the true meaning of a seemingly irrational action – a teacher washing his students' feet.

"What did Jesus do when he washed the disciples' feet?" asks Origen. "Did he not, by washing their feet . . . make them beautiful, so that they might be ready to preach the good news?" (*CJn* 32.7.77) Using an interpretive technique by which the meaning of a single word, object, or symbol is drawn from one part of Scripture and applied to another, Origen evokes Romans

10:15 and Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news of good things” (*CJn* 32.7.78). This is why footwashing is necessary for the disciples to have a part of Jesus. One must have “beautiful feet” in order to proclaim Christ.

Footwashing makes the disciples into such witnesses in at least two ways. First, “washing their feet” represents Jesus’ teaching them how to avoid sin and acquire virtue. In antiquity, effective teaching was measured not in assent to propositions but by whether learners changed their way of life and followed in the way of truth.¹⁵ Because Jesus is the teacher, the teaching is effective, and by living according to the Logos the disciples have a share in the Logos. The virtue of the disciples, as interpreters, is an important restraint on fanciful or arbitrary spiritual interpretation. An interpreter who is truthful and charitable, for example, will tend to give interpretations consistent with his character and thus the presence of the Holy Spirit in him.

Second, Jesus turns students into teachers. “Jesus washes his disciples’ feet as their teacher and his servants’ feet as their lord” (*CJn* 32.10.115). The distinction of teacher and lord is important because the mission of the Logos is not exhausted by its teaching function. “And this is the purpose of the teacher – in his capacity as teacher – in relation to his disciple, to make the disciple like himself, so that he may no longer require his teacher in that capacity, even if he still needs him in some other capacity” (*CJn* 32.10.118). By contrast, a lord does not wish for a servant to become a lord (*CJn* 32.10.120). For a teacher to teach effectively and to make a teacher out of the student, he must first come down to the student’s level. This is what Peter did not understand.

At an historical level, the story is about Peter learning how and why Jesus, the Logos, humbles himself to be an effective teacher. Through spiritual interpretation, the contemporary reader also learns how the Logos humbles itself in the form of Scripture to make her the subject of the Logos’ teaching action. Just as Jesus’ washing of Peter’s feet seemed a stumbling block to Peter, so the text itself contains a stumbling block that is overcome when the reader resolves to see Peter’s censure of Jesus as the barrier redirecting attention to how Peter is being taught and thus how to become a student like him. Jesus’ action prepares the disciples to accommodate the truth of the Logos to others – to preach and to teach in the church. Origen himself is such a teacher. As a student of Scripture, he has been effectively taught by the

Logos and thus he and his commentary are incorporated into God's pedagogical rationality.

That the Logos humbles itself to wash the feet of the disciples and to clothe itself in the form of Scripture says something about who God is. The Gnostics believed that the Logos did not unite itself to the material realm but brought a secret teaching only for the spiritual elite. Origen's assumption that Jesus' footwashing is fully the action of Logos, and thus of God, means that this God extends salvation to all and assists the ascent of the soul regardless of how advanced or simple it is. Scripture has a "body," or literal meaning, in order to be accessible to all, even beginners (*OFP* 4.2.4). For precisely this reason, spiritual interpretation is required as a later stage in the process. The Gnostics believed the Old Testament law was evil, not a preparation for Christ. But Origen held the Old Testament is part of God's pedagogical strategy by which those who lack spiritual understanding can follow the literal meaning of the law, for example, and grow in the virtue that will later enable a deeper interpretation. Though Origen seems to disparage the physical, he explicitly rejects the Gnostic option. The material realm is not evil, nor is its significance self-contained. Rather, creation points to the source and end in God, and God's intention to return all things to himself.

Origen and Present Debates

The contemporary reader may charge that Origen has arbitrarily allegorized a story that is obviously about service and a ritual practice exemplifying it. Surely Jesus' act of service is the story's historical referent. While we should consider this view, along with others, we can nevertheless learn something from Origen's reading strategy. Both his interpretation and the contemporary one presume what happened back then is to be repeated or re-enacted in the present.

Origen is helpful in today's debates by reminding us that the unity between the past and present is not based on our interpretive efforts to understand, for example, the social significance of footwashing in the ancient world (though such understanding will undoubtedly be illuminating). Rather, our community with the Samaritan woman is rooted in God's activity – God's desire to save both her and us and to use the testimony of the former as a means to the latter. Attending to the Holy Spirit's intention in placing a particular text before us leads to plausibly interpreting footwashing in terms of increasing the capacity of disciples to become teachers and to make the Logos accessible

to others. Such an interpretation is “historical,” but not if history is assumed to be an external, neutral category. The character of history itself is defined within the text¹⁶ as the sphere in which God places the incarnate Logos and the text of Scripture before our senses so that we may be drawn upwards to God. Origen believes God’s divine economy “operates in the same way in Scripture and in the natural world, in the salvation of the cosmos and in each individual soul. . . .”¹⁷ Since history is the context God has provided for souls to ascend, Scripture as the Word clothed in passages and sounds is an appropriate, enduring way for this ascent to be realized *in time* and *at all times* because by its nature it draws the soul from the material letter to the saving spirit.

In addition Origen helps us think about the authority of Scripture. This authority is soteriological. It is neither an inherent quality of the text nor strictly subjective in corresponding to merely human experiences. Its authority is a function of how God has placed it before us as an aid to our movement towards God. Yet, in light of how the historical-critical method has often made the Bible inaccessible to the “ordinary” reader without facility in ancient languages, cultures, and textual traditions, Origen’s framework gives the text back to all those God intends to save (for Origen, a universal intention). There is certainly an essential role for human teachers and authoritative interpreters of the text, though their expertise is valid only if soteriologically oriented. Indeed, the teacher shows herself to be a teacher of the text not by reporting on what it definitively means but by initiating others to see the levels of spiritual meaning.

Multiple meanings are consistent with the text’s purpose. Debates about interpretation ought not to be conducted as if there is a decisive, timeless interpretation. David C. Steinmetz contends that “The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text, with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning with all its demonstrable virtues, is false.”¹⁸ The transformative encounter with the text is already an aspect of the text’s meaning, and it yields meaning differently to those at different stages of their spiritual journey. Yet, pure subjectivism is avoided because meaning is linked with God’s saving intentions that are decisively revealed even though the drama is not yet completed.

The embrace of multiple meanings can also help us appropriate insights from a theologian as controversial as Origen, some of whose teachings were

condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.¹⁹ We need not adopt his view of materiality, cosmology, the equation of Jewish interpretation with literal interpretation, or even his account of the soul, in order to be taught by him. We may prefer to think of ongoing conversion rather than spiritual ascent, for example. Given his conjectural and multiple interpretations, learning from Origen would not commit us to adopting his particular interpretations. He would himself demand that even our historical-critical knowledge, which insofar as it is true is the witness of the Logos, be brought to bear on the reading of Scripture so long as this serves the author's soteriological intention.

Finally, Origen is a helpful guide because he pushes us to think about the intrinsic connection between what a text is, what it is for, and how it is to be interpreted. For him, the whole of Scripture is a text like no other. It is unified in its author's unique intention to guide the soul to salvation. Scripture does this by being what it is – a text. Clothed by the Holy Spirit in passages and sounds, the Logos presents itself as the message and incorporates readers and interpreters into itself. In the interpretive movement from the literal to the spiritual, the soul gains a greater share in the Logos and inches the cosmos towards the time that God will be “all” and “in all” (*OFP* 1.4.4, referring to 1 Cor. 15:28).

Notes

¹ See Waldemar Janzen, “Canon and Canonical Scripture Interpretation,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 6 (2005): 22-31; Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

² Benjamin Jowett, professor of Greek at Oxford, wrote in 1859: “Scripture has one meaning – the meaning which it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it. . . . The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in the company with the author.” Cited in David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 26. Steinmetz concedes that no contemporary biblical scholar would make such a bald claim, yet the disagreement would not be with this basic hermeneutical theory but “over the application of that theory to . . . exegetical practice,” 27.

³ Gerald T. Sheppard, *The Future of the Bible: Beyond Liberalism and Liberalism* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1990), 43.

⁴ Robert W. Jenson, “Hermeneutics and the Life of the Church,” in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, eds., Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 103. R.

R. Reno observes that modern readers have come to assume that the difficulty in understanding Scripture derives from the neutral fact of our historical distance from the strange world of 2000 years ago. Reno replies that our true distance from the text is a spiritual one resulting from the hard demands of the Gospel. We try to hide our sinful recoil at these hard demands by reckoning it as a historical problem. R. R. Reno, *The Ruins of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), chapter 10.

⁵ E.g., Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), chapter 7.

⁶ Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 2.

⁷ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*.

⁸ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8-9.

⁹ References to Origen's work are made parenthetically in the paper. *CJn* = *Commentary on John* in Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998). *OFP* = *On First Principles*, ed. and trans. G.W. Butterworth (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

¹⁰ Karen J. Torjesen carefully considers Origen's discussion in *OFP* 4.2.4 of a three-fold distinction in Scripture between its "body", "soul" and "spirit." See "'Body', 'soul' and 'spirit' in Origen's Theory of Exegesis," *Anglican Theological Review* 67 (1985): 19-24. The literal and the historical are not the same moment; the former refers to words themselves and the latter to the event. Cf. Karen J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 139. I am not attending to this literal sense of Scripture in this paper.

¹¹ Karen J. Torjesen, "Origen's Interpretation of the Psalms," *Studia Patristica* 17.2 (1982): 945.

¹² R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 364.

¹³ I am persuaded by Kilian McDonnell that Origen's subordinationism is functional but not ontological. Kilian McDonnell, "Does Origen Have a Trinitarian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit?" *Gregorianum* 75 (1994): 5-35.

¹⁴ Mark Edwards, "Christ or Plato? Origen on Revelation and Anthropology," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, eds. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 20.

¹⁵ Torjesen, "'Body,' 'Soul,' and 'Spirit,'" 17.

¹⁶ Cf. Robert W. Jenson: "[T]he community from which Scripture comes and which is its immediate community of interpretation is simply the same community, the church, that we are The historical distance that faith must indeed keep open, and of which historical-critical reading can maintain awareness, is the distance between Moses and the later prophets, between Jesus and Paul, between Paul and us, but never between the story as a whole and us, never between the biblical community as a whole and us." Jenson, "Hermeneutics," 104.

¹⁷ Joseph W. Trigg, "Introduction," in *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998), 62.

¹⁸ Steinmetz, "Pre-critical Exegesis," 37.

¹⁹ Noting that sympathizers and critics alike often interpreted short passages out of context and took speculative hypotheses as Origen's definitive views, Trigg reminds us that Origen "died a confessor in the communion of the church," Trigg, "Introduction," 64.

Dallas Wiebe. *On the Cross: Devotional Poems*. Line drawings by John Leon, based on crosses by Paul Friesen. DreamSeeker Books (Cascadia Publishing House), co-published with Herald Press, 2005.

Throughout his long career, Dallas Wiebe – poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist – has been both serious and playful, sacred and profane. He has enjoyed creating literary parodies; at the same time, he has produced work that is deeply moving and spiritually invigorating. His work manifests sometimes a tender lyricism, sometimes a delicate – or a rough – piety.

Born in Kansas in 1930, Wiebe graduated from Bethel College in 1954. In 1960 he received a PhD in literature from the University of Michigan, and from 1963 until retiring in 1995 he taught at the University of Cincinnati. Recently, he has taken a significant place in the expanding world of “Mennonite” literary figures. From the 1960s to the late 1980s, little on the surface of his work linked him with either Mennonites or Christians in general. By the late ’80s, however, audiences such as those developing through the Mennonite/s Writing conferences – at Conrad Grebel University College (1990), Goshen College (1997, 2002), and Bluffton University (forthcoming, 2006) – began to recognize him as an “elder statesman” among American-Mennonite writers. *Mennonite Life* and *The New Quarterly* published lengthy pieces of his “Mennonite” fiction beginning in 1989 and the early 1990s.

On the Cross is both devotional and disturbing. The topic – the cross in our culture – offers an opportunity for Wiebe to express his religious sensibility. His emotional and intellectual register moves in and out of the deeply personal, his poetic language encompassing a ready bluntness and a gentle piety. In the first of his opening poems, “Going to the Cross,” the initial sentence, responding to the poem’s title, puts it simply: “It’s not easy to find.” “The Anabaptist Radiance” suggests comic bemusement with its opening image, “We are marching, marching upward / into the afterglow of our ancestors.” In “Christmas Eve, 1998,” we enter a tender, yet ever so slightly ironically observed, moment: “It’s a first for us; / Christmas Eve alone. My wife and I sit / and wonder / What to do / To greet a savior’s birth / by ourselves / in silence and old age.” In “Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me,” the speaker seems at first brazen, even sacrilegious, when he asks in response to the command: “How is that possible? / Who could bear the weight, / And

who knows how to follow?" We soon learn that the voice belongs to an authentic quester. The plain-spoken narrator in the end takes up the cross, "no matter how heavy, / and how far." In "Lift High the Cross," as elsewhere, the narrator carries the wrenching, startling, political punch of Dylan Thomas's narrator in poems such as "Do Not Go Gentle."

One of Wiebe's concerns is the spiritual and intellectual dullness by which North American society pushes and drifts along. In "On a Hill Far Away" he stingingly rebukes society's preference for commodifying its icons, for turning the cross into a fashion statement. Some poems ("Punch Lines," "Gladly the Cross I'd Bear," "On a Hill Faraway") start with or hint at bad jokes, silly rhymes, popular songs; but they progress to searing looks into the human heart, and the body that contains it.

Wiebe boldly makes the speaker's body a site for the cross in one series of four poems (31-37). Here he projects the body under a surgeon's knife and, without blasphemy, observes that an operation "left upon my chest / a scar in the shape of the cross." The scar becomes a sign not just of physical healing but of spiritual rebirth: "My cross that will not / let me forget / That moment God tried / to save us all." But the narrator's scar also invites sardonic humor, as in the opening lines of "My Pectoral Cross": "It's not much of a cross / but it will have to do"!

This collection not only plays with various themes but foregrounds a range of sources. For example, one sequence of poems responds to El Greco, Dali, and Grünewald (24-28), another to Emily Dickinson and William Carlos Williams (62-63). In "A Note to Paul Friesen" Wiebe addresses the Kansas-based artist, visual adaptations of whose sculptures of the cross punctuate the text. Cincinnati-based artist and sculptor John Leon has used a line-drawing technique to present images of Friesen's crosses – sculpted from wood and installed in a number of Mennonite and Methodist churches in the United States. The images are rivetting in their elegance, simplicity, and understated passion.

There are over forty poems in the collection, which Wiebe has dedicated to his wife, Virginia (Schroeder) Wiebe, who died in 2002. Here celebrations of Christ, life, the body, and the soul offer contemplative material for worship, meditation, and encouragement. The final poem, its shape recalling a cross, offers a poignant closing:

INRI

In his hands
the iron nails.

In his side
the iron spear.

On his head
a crown of thorns.

In his arid mouth the final words.

In his longsuffering the first offering.

In his slow death the first redemption.

In his sight
the standing mother.

In his nostrils
the whiff of Rome.

In his ears
the babbling mob.

In his mouth
the sour drink.

In his dying
the wind of eternity.

In his burial
the promise of life.

In his resurrection the sign we all awaited.

In his ascension the rising of our souls.

Paul Tiessen, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON

Hans Küng. *My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Hans Küng has never been praised for brevity. Among his many books, *On Being a Christian* (1976) covers 720 pages, *Does God Exist?* (1980) lasts for 839, and *Christianity: Essence, History and Future* (1995) consumes 936. I should not have been surprised, then, after freeing large chunks of time for these tightly printed, 478-page *Memoirs*, to find that they merely constitute Volume I! (Küng anticipates only one more Volume – as of now.)

Lengthy as Küng's productions are, his writing style is smooth, engaging, often moving, and as readable as possible when the subject matter becomes complex. Nearly all readers, though, will find some sections too detailed and will want to skim or skip them. Yet the sections omitted by some readers will be interesting to others, who will welcome their wealth of information.

My Struggle for Freedom covers four main periods, linked by the author's growing appreciation of, and emphasis on, freedom: (1) Early years in his native Switzerland (1928-48), strongly shaped by its heritage of political and cultural freedom. (2) Study for the priesthood in Rome (1948-55), where his conscience gradually attained freedom. This period gave Küng surprisingly frequent contact with the leading theologians and officials of pre-Vatican II Catholicism, including Pope Pius IX. (3) Küng's increasing advocacy of freedom of thought, expression, and publication against conservative Roman resistance (1955-62), including a brief pastorate, teaching at Tübingen University, and early controversial publications. (4) The running debates, intrigues and shifting alliances experienced during Vatican II and shortly thereafter (1962-68), which brought the "universal Catholic Church" a measure of "modern freedom" from the "medieval Roman system."

The author aims to provide "objective" accounts of these events. Before long, however, the reader gets used to hearing about the "hell of the totalitarian Roman inquisition" that can burn deviants "psychologically" (99), or of Rome's "absolutist system like that of the French kings without the guillotine" (357). This is the Küng who often employs language like that of oppressed theological minorities (e.g., Black theologians), and frequently draws standing-room crowds, almost uniquely among theologians.

Küng's numerous, detailed, insider accounts of major events, persons, and processes provide invaluable insight into the volatile transition from pre-

to post-Vatican II Catholicism. Even those acquainted with much of this history will be surprised and enlightened by many specifics.

The author's comprehensive narrative also lends insight into where he stands theologically. Küng seeks to erect his theology from Scripture, interpreted in historical-critical fashion, which shakes many a treasured Roman teaching (e.g., papal infallibility). His emphasis on freedom, conscience, and reason are clearly modern, in contrast to postmodern. *My Struggle for Freedom* chronicles Küng's great admiration for, and reciprocal admiration from, the neo-orthodox Protestant theologian Karl Barth. Yet he begins his theology not with God's revealed Word, like Barth, but with a more general trust in existence accessible to all humans and in all religions. Küng often sounds more like a liberal Protestant than a Catholic theologian.

Apparently his Roman superiors have heard him similarly. Yet Küng insists that he does not "repudiate the pope, but papalism," not "the Roman center but its centralism, legalism and triumphalism" (426). He argues that this center has been misshapen by medieval hierarchalism for a millennium, and often contrasts it with universal Catholicism. Nonetheless, he still expresses hope that authentic Catholicism can be Roman. On the other hand, Küng evaluates Vatican II more negatively than many others, and almost seems to predict at times that Rome will inevitably keep turning back from the Council's reforms.

Küng's *Memoirs* (Volume I) close by detailing the author's relationship with Joseph Ratzinger, whose recent election as Pope has apparently fulfilled those dire predictions. Until about 1967, he and Ratzinger were allies in struggle against the Roman system. But then Ratzinger shifted course and became a chief Vatican spokesman. Küng tells us that he too might have attained high Church office, had he moderated his tone and become more obedient. He surmises that Ratzinger accepted those conditions. Looking back on his career in 1996, Küng concluded:

I could not have gone another way, not just for the sake of freedom, which has always been dear to me, but also for the sake of truth. . . . I would have sold my soul for power in the church. And I can only hope that my contemporary and colleague, Joseph Ratzinger, who took the other way, is also as content and happy as I am as I look back on my life . . . (461).

Thomas Finger, scholar and writer, Evanston, IL

David Augsburger. *Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

When David Augsburger checked a local research library, he found 4000 titles about love but only 41 about hate. This 100:1 ratio, he suggests, indicates that we are in denial about hate. At minimum, our understanding of it is simplistic, much too limited, and too negative.

Augsburger argues that hate is not a single, simple emotion but rather is composed of a family of emotions. In Chapter 1, he describes a nuanced spectrum of hate, ranging from *simple hatred* through *spiteful hatred*, *malicious hatred*, *retributive hatred*, *principled hatred*, *moral hatred* and, finally, *just hatred*. While he does not assume a linear progress through stages, he views movement through this range as a journey from natural but unhealthy hate toward healthy hate. This journey involves an increasing ability to think objectively about the events and people involved, to separate wrongdoing from wrongdoer, and then to develop compassion for the wrongdoer while hating injustice. Hate becomes more “positive” as it moves through this spectrum. In *just hatred*, the highest form of hatred, love and hatred come together. The discussion of this subject is one of the book’s most important contributions.

Succeeding chapters explore the journey: why and how hate arises; how empathy can be developed and how transformation happens; the relationship between hate and memory and the stages of “hate-work”; and the respective roles of the “shadow self,” absolutes, and enemies. As well, the author analyzes real-life situations: hate-crimes, the Cold War, the holocaust, and others. Importantly, he argues that role of Christian theology in justifying anti-Semitism and the holocaust is one of the most pressing questions confronting Christianity today.

In Chapter 4, Augsburger explores the role of “re-membering” and re-storying (my word) in trauma and its transcendence. Brooding, he argues, is to hate as mourning is to grief: a normal and perhaps essential phase of recovery. In this chapter and in several appendices, he describes the hard but liberating work of hate-work.

The final chapter – on justice – opens with the story of Jacob and Joseph. It, and the book, ends with an analysis of the Psalter, especially the

difficult Psalm 139, as a paradigm of the movement from moral hate to just hate. In the process, the author concludes with a discussion of forgiveness and its many misconceptions. Most important here is his claim that in our individualistic culture, forgiveness has been reduced to individual therapeutic healing rather than a relational dynamic.

Augsburger argues that the thread of justice runs through the various stages of hate-work. He delineates five types of justice: attributive, retributive, distributive, redemptive, and restorative. He then explores the nature of justice and mercy involved in just hate, arguing that redemptive and restorative justice are the healthiest forms.

The overlap between categories of hate is confusing at points. While the author recognizes that these are neither inevitable nor linear stages, the reader could easily lose track of this. It might be helpful to conceive these as points on a spiral, similar to the way that the STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience) program describes the victim/aggressor journey. (See Carolyn Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books; forthcoming fall 2005). Other than that, I see little to criticize.

Augsburger has written this book first of all for caregivers – counselors, social workers, mediators, and lawyers – but also for nonprofessionals. He also has a Christian audience in mind – but not exclusively. This volume will be useful for study in many fields, and will be especially helpful for classes focusing on identity, trauma, reconciliation and the like. It is, moreover, essential reading for those involved in justice and peacebuilding work, and in pastoral care.

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Yoder, John Howard. *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. Ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs. Radical Traditions Series: Theology in a Postcritical Key. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, England: Eerdmans, 2003.

The reader of this volume will get three unique impressions of the text, conveyed by (a) reading only the material written by Yoder and interpreting it for her/himself; (b) reading only the material written by Cartwright and Ochs; and (c) reading the book as it is formatted, with editorial direction and interpretation as a guide.

Judging by its cover, one expects this book to revisit aspects of the Jewish-Christian schism, as written by Yoder and edited by Cartwright and Ochs. However, this is not the case. Instead, it is either an introduction by Ochs to post-liberal Jewish thought or a post-liberal Jewish dialogue between Ochs and “Yoder” on ideas contained in the latter’s posthumously published writings. If it is an introduction to post-liberal Jewish thought about the Jewish-Christian schism, then we can see how Ochs employs Yoder’s writings as a foil to advance the discussion from the perspective of “post-liberal Jews” to distance Yoder’s thesis and approach from subsequent debate.

Ten of Yoder’s essays provide the body of the text. This is supplemented by a (second) preface and a conclusionary sermon (Appendix A), both by Yoder. Yoder’s contribution comprises 156 pages of this 290-page work. The rest is by the editors: an editors’ introduction before Yoder’s preface, commentary by Ochs at the conclusion of each essay, an afterword by Cartwright, and an essay by Cartwright attempting to contextualize Yoder’s theological dialogue with Judaism. The book also includes a glossary and three indexes.

(a) *Yoder’s Content* Yoder expressed reluctance to publish these essays, which he had been working on from 1971 to 1996. He wanted to undertake further interaction with the writings of Krister Stendahl, Lloyd Gaston, Alan Segal, John Gager, James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and James Sanders. Only in the last section of his preface do we learn the collection is dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Steven S. Schwarzchild.

Yoder revisits Judaism and Christianity at a definitive, schismatic, intersecting point in their histories. With rabbinic insights provided through ongoing correspondence with Schwarzchild (Yoder calls him as his own

Rabbi), in wondering whether a schism need have occurred, Yoder explores what better path could have been taken by the two monotheistic religions in their nascent stages. He adopts three classic models — a Jeremaic Judaism that gives way to Rabbinic (Judaism) and to messianic (Christianity) offspring — to advance his reconstruction. He hopes to initiate a resumption of dialogue characterized by respect and acknowledgement of the other's religious convictions. ("Both parties agree on what happened and why. My claim is that they are wrong not where they differ but where they agree" [31].)

b) Ochs and Cartwright's Content Yoder's thesis and approach are framed in a context that highlights theoretical and methodological constructs of the Society for Textual Reasoning, of which Ochs is a member. The Society, boasting some 300 members, seeks "to articulate the patterns of Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic reasoning that could guide religious reformation after the Shoah" (5). Textual reasoners purposefully distance themselves from the "first principles of reasoning imposed by the modern Academy" and distinguish their efforts from those of Rabbinic scholars, whom they label as anti-modern because they "insulate an 'indigenous' Rabbinic tradition from any exposure to the 'alien' influences of modern thinking." Ochs and other textual reasoners instead determine to combine Rabbinic sacred literature with academic exigency, unfettered by the Rabbinic tradition's hermeneutical demands or the Academy's scholastic containment.

Ochs's concern that Yoder's thesis offers the potential for a supercessionist strategy (68) appears unfounded. Yoder has stated his opposition to any expression of that view ("The theological claim that the Church has replaced God's people for the salvation and blessing of the world," as indicated by identification as God's elect people and royal/holy priesthood). Even when explaining supercessionism, Yoder indicated his own view moved well beyond it. Some 39 times in his responses to Yoder, Ochs refers to a Jewish "post-liberal" counter-perspective. By this epithet he encapsulates his stance and that of other contemporary, post-Holocaust Jewish scholars, contrasting or comparing it to identifiable "others" within the Judaisms of past and present. (Yoder refers to some seventeen varieties of Judaism.) I sometimes identify with the post-liberal soubriquet myself but wonder what other Jewish scholars might think of inclusion in this category. Ochs argues that Yoder's reconstruction at times portrays a Judaism unrecognizable to

him and his Textual Reasoning colleagues. So far as Yoder expresses dependency on a Jewish perspective appropriated through extensive dialogue with Schwarzchild, Ochs's criticism is directed primarily at the latter (7, 12-19, 92, 120, 203).

Cartwright concludes his part of the editors' introduction in a summary statement of Yoder's thesis. "Yoder's argument is directed at overthrowing the assumptions of Constantinian Christianity as they have shaped *virtually all* forms of religious practice in western civilization since the second century CE" (22), an imprecision of Yoder's own timeline that Ochs corrects (67). He cautions against accepting Yoder's attempt to re-situate the conversation between Jews and Christians to a pacifistic, nonviolence forum. Yoder "not only does not aptly characterize the deviance of the 'pacifism of rabbinical nonviolence' but displaces the necessity for contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue" (23-24).

Cartwright and Ochs should be recognized as this book's real authors. In making the case for a post-liberal Jewish approach to the topic, Ochs offers the greater contribution. Cartwright's introductory words and afterword summarize what Ochs and Yoder have already introduced, and his appendix on (re)locating Yoder's dialogue is misplaced. On this reading, Yoder's essays serve mainly as a foil for Ochs to advance the ideas of the textual reasoners.

(c) *Reading The Text as a Whole* The format establishes Cartwright and Ochs's material as a *clavis scripturae* or *crux interpretum* for Yoder's thoughts. If the former (*clavis*, a key), then Yoder's best thoughts are highlighted by their additions. If the latter (*crux*, a decisive point), his intentions are compromised by an imposed editorial hermeneutic.

Given that the "editors" have both the first and last word for the entire collection, and an interpretive word at the end of each chapter, their names should be included as authors. Further, given that they employ Yoder's essays to advance their own thesis towards Jewish-Christian dialogue, perhaps his name should be removed completely as author, and a title change would be in order. I suggest: *On Yoder's Unpublished Collection of Essays Entitled, The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited: Why It Does Not Offer a Valid Paradigm for Modern Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, by Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs.

I also note that neither Yoder nor Cartwright and Ochs interact with the internationally acknowledged Christian statement about the Church and Jews in the *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II. As well, no mention is made of the great contributions of the statement's authors, Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher and Sister Rose Thering.

It is regrettable that we cannot know Yoder's response to the way his essays are arranged in the present dialogical format, and we may wonder what his rejoinder would be to Ochs and Cartwright.

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Loren L. Johns. *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*. Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

This volume explores one aspect of the Apocalypse's rhetorical force, namely the integral link between its Lamb Christology and ethics. Loren Johns argues that by his faithful witness unto death, Jesus, the slaughtered lamb, conquered evil and thereby became a model for first-century believers' own nonviolent resistance to evil. Johns's reading of the text seeks both faithfulness to its historical context and concern for the effects of the reading on the community of faith. Both of these aims he accomplishes well.

Much of this book is a detailed examination of the semantic and religious-historical background of the image of Christ as lamb, in order to understand its associations for the original readers of the Apocalypse. A study of the semantic domain of "lamb" in biblical and extra-biblical writings results in the cautious conclusion that "lamb" in the Apocalypse has a non-sacrificial connotation and expresses vulnerability. To establish the cultural gestalt of ovine symbolism in the Apocalypse, Johns examines the role of sheep in Paleolithic art, Egyptian religion, Aesopic fables, and Greek and Roman mythology, art, and religion. A study of early Jewish literature and rabbinic literature follows. Johns finds no precedent for the triumphant Lamb Redeemer figure in Early Judaism, where lambs usually symbolize vulnerability.

A discussion of method in symbol analysis in chapter 5 prepares the way for questions addressed in the final chapter: What kind of symbolic universe does the Lamb Christology help to construct, and what does it *do* within that symbolic universe? (120) Johns argues that the social-historical setting of the Apocalypse is not a specific experience of persecution but the pervasive economic and political seductiveness of the imperial cult. The chapter examines traditions in the Hebrew Bible upon which the author of the Apocalypse may have drawn. Johns concludes that “the concept of non-violence or vulnerability seems most capable of characterizing the symbolism expressed in most of these symbolic uses of lamb” (148). This vulnerability is not helpless victimization but leads to victory.

Johns’s final chapter takes up the project’s core question, the rhetorical force of the Lamb Christology. It focuses on Revelation 5, which provides the “rhetorical fulcrum” of the whole Apocalypse. The crucial reversal occurs when the One worthy to open the scroll switches from being the Lion of Judah to the slaughtered Lamb. The nonviolent resistance of the slain but victorious Lamb is paradigmatic for believers’ own response to evil. Johns explores key exegetical terms such as “witness” and “victory,” and investigates the ethical import of the violent imagery.

It is not entirely clear how the examination of lambs in Greco-Roman culture helps clarify the rhetorical impact of lamb symbolism on the primarily Jewish Christian, “average Ephesian” audience of the Apocalypse, since it seems to yield few results for this study. One also wonders why Johns devotes so much attention to the “ram” traditions when he has already argued that the animal in question in the Apocalypse is the “lamb” and not the ram (23-25).

As well, Johns’s argument sometimes needs further support. For example, except for citing Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as a precedent (123, n 57), he does not defend deciding to translate the Greek term as “consistent resistance” instead of the usual “patient endurance.” Also, at one point he implies that the disciples’ *safety* is in view in Luke 10:3, whereas the real issue in this text is their *danger* (144). In his argument that “lamb” in the Septuagint “symbolizes defenceless vulnerability in the face of violent power” (148), it is hard to see how the “trembling submission” of Ps. 114: 4, 6 or the tender care of the shepherd in Isa. 40:11 (Aquila ms.) constitutes vulnerability in the face of “violent power.” Finally, although Johns does believe that the

triumph of the Lamb comes through death *and* resurrection, he often settles for language that asserts “evil is conquered by the death of the lamb” (194) and that defines “victory as non-violent resistance to the point of death” (170). More explicit emphasis that victory comes through God’s *overturning* of death might have been helpful.

The author does persuasively argue that the Lamb Christology has ethical implications for Christians’ nonviolent resistance. The attention to exegetical detail and the thorough exploration of the religio-historical background of the lamb imagery is an obvious strength, even as it marks the book as more for scholars than non-specialists. Especially valuable is Johns’s balanced consideration of the merits and problems associated with seeing each Old Testament tradition as an antecedent for the Lamb Christology. The book’s critical engagement with current scholarship is also a strength, especially in the last chapter, where Johns forthrightly addresses difficult questions that might challenge his thesis. His scholarship will be welcomed especially by pacifist Christians troubled by the violence of the Apocalypse and unsure about its ethical relevance.

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Jean Janzen. *Piano in the Vineyard*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004; David Waltner-Toews. *The Complete Tante Tina: Mennonite Blues and Recipes*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004.

Jean Janzen and David Waltner-Toews are two of the earliest successful poets in the late-twentieth century flowering of Mennonite literature. Both poets use the cruel experiences of their Russländer ancestors to fine effect. And in the two books under review, both offer their best, mature poems. But, otherwise, what an odd couple they make for a combined book review!

Waltner-Toews writes dramatic monologues in the swaggering, colloquial sprawl of Whitman. Janzen writes closely observed, restrained lyrics in the manner of Dickinson.

Waltner-Toews uses poems for social commentary, often drawing parallels between current events and Mennonites' experience in Russia; Janzen explores personal and spiritual conditions and uses Mennonites' experience in Russia as a kind of origins myth for tragedy. Because Waltner-Toews relishes the materiality of life, he alternates juicy recipes with his poems. Janzen embraces the created world, too, but also art and music as she reaches for the transcendent.

The Complete Tante Tina is a compilation of all of Waltner-Toews's poems that feature the *persona* of Tante Tina and depict her family's development through three generations—her own, her son Haenschen's, and his son Johnny's. Waltner-Toews says the book's purpose is to “make some sense of her life” (127).

As the sequence of poems unfolds, we learn about Tante Tina and her Low German immigrant culture; Haenschen's rejection of his background; and Johnny's quasi-return, thanks to developments in the Canadian counter-culture. As her children become formally educated, Tante Tina becomes self-educated enough to address people and affairs of the world—most wonderfully Salman Rushdie but also Maggie Thatcher, Pierre Trudeau, and even Rudy Wiebe. Tina seems to think the world's ills could be cured if only the movers and shakers could share a faspa with her. Her history concludes with her death, lovingly tended by her musician/poet grandson: “When life slides down the snowbank, / tobogganing, to frozen toes, and gone, / what can be said? Hang on. / Into the dazzling light, / hang on” (92).

Waltner-Toews implies that the genius of poetic utterance among Russian Mennonites resided in their immigrant folk culture. The poems of third-generation Johnny, for instance, are good, but not as good as Tina's. As in “Little Haenschen's Vision,” Johnny tends toward explicit rant against the troubles of the world, less well redeemed by humor and charm. However, Waltner-Toews's own powers seem undiminished, since one of the finest poems in the collection, “My Map of the Promised Land,” was written only recently.

Waltner-Toews has said he uses Tante Tina because he can “say” so much more through her persona. In the Thatcher poem he criticizes heartless conservatism. In the Trudeau poem he endorses liberalism. And in the Rushdie

poem he emphasizes that “God is in the story hiding,” making a convincing case for the religious value of art.

What makes such poems so appealing is the Low German vocabulary and syntax of Tina’s discourse. On the surface that can make things seem all “aufgemixed” (42). But Waltner-Toews is that rarest of poets who can create a new language or poetic diction. That it is “only” Plautdietsch-influenced English should not detract from his achievement—although it necessarily reduces his appeal to a mainstream English audience. Alas, his poems will not be published in the journal *Poetry*, as Janzen’s have been.

The voice in Janzen’s poems is quiet, self-effacing, and sensitive to the surrounding people and natural world. *The Piano in the Vineyard* offers abundant examples of finely honed form, consisting of page or half-page poems written in short, compact lines, occasionally in two- or three-line stanzas that sometimes jell into slant-rimed sonnets.

Janzen’s true *métier* is the sharply observed image that leaps into metaphor and then blossoms into transcendental insight. I expected to find that movement here, and did, but was moved first by the autumnal subject and tone of most of the poems. The first section, “Broken Places,” deals with the deaths of a baby, a friend by cancer, a squirrel by electrocution—“all of us shipwrecked / clutching what we can” (20). The second section, “The Garden,” presents the yearly cycle, but it begins and ends in winter. Most of the poems in “Carving the Hollow” are elegies for victims of the troubles in Ukraine.

The title poem for the book and for the final section, “Piano in the Vineyard,” emphasizes the redemptive turn found in virtually all of Janzen’s poems. Janzen depicts the vineyard in wintertime, following pruning, when its stark outlines suggest a cemetery instead. The bare vines suggest a broken body when the speaker’s husband winds them around grape stakes to make a crude cross for Holy Saturday.

But the old piano standing in the vineyard offers something even more than hope. Like the music of Chopin and Ravel (or the art of Cranach or Rubens), it affirms the “pause before the next movement, / which is the first and last fire” (67), suggesting Godself, as known by Pascal and the mystics. “Fire,” which also appears in other poems, is the book’s final word.

Janzen's physical images move one toward transcendent awareness and experience, not just insight. Images from the conclusions of her poems suggest the Hopkins-like plenitude characterizing her world: "seeds of stars," "the whole world is lit from within," "Love gazes at you," "spilling into the night," "a silence which is immense and open."

Piano in the Vineyard may be Janzen's equivalent to Keats's "Ode to Autumn," but her poems move beyond Bach's (and Keats's) "It is enough" to the healing of the "broken heart" (18) through the forgiveness found in Schumann's "I bear no resentment" (18).

Janzen and Waltner-Toews *are* alike in a very important way. Both are faithful members of the Mennonite church, which can be grateful that the contemporary Anabaptist tradition is represented so well in the world of letters.

Ervin Beck, *Goshen College*

CONFERENCE NOTICES

June 8-10, 2006 Biennial Meetings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network and the Anabaptist Sociology and Anthropology Association. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN. Held under auspices of The Institute of Mennonite Studies. THEME: Holding Fast to the Confession of Our Hope: The *Confession of Faith* Ten Years Later. www.hillsdale.edu/Acad/Assoc/Soc/asaa/Confession.

June 11-13, 2006 Third Mennonite Graduate Student Conference. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN. Sponsored by Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. THEME: Exclusion. Send proposals (due Jan. 15) to www.mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca. Conference website: www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/tmtc/gradconf.shtml.