Touchstone

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Theology: The Next Generation

Reviews

Editorial

This issue of *Touchstone* is a little bit of a departure from our usual format in that it is not organized around a specific theme. Instead, we feature the work of the "next generation" of younger theologians, including two pastors, two doctoral students and two seminary professors.

Mari Joerstad, who teaches at the Vancouver School of Theology, has written an article that reminds of me of James McLendon's expression "biography as theology." A spiritually inquisitive child raised in a non-religious home with a love of the outdoors, Mari developed an interest in the place of "other-than-animal-nature" in the Bible and the language around the living connection of forests, fields and mountains to the creator. This often-neglected biblical tradition can deepen our relationship of gratitude and dependence on the God who made the heavens and the earth.

Morgan Bell, a doctoral student at the Toronto School of Theology, takes a deep dive into the regulative and normative role of the concept of "ethos" in the United Church. He offers a critical insight into the "soft power" exerted by this sometimes vague concept and advocates for a greater role for the more explicit norms of doctrine and polity in forming community and exercising discipline.

Lucila Crena, currently on faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. analyzes the dominant mode of "prophecy as critique." When prophecy is seen as simply recalling worldly powers to faithful adherence to the dominant myths and narratives of a community, it can actually end up strengthening those powers by sacralizing them. Lucila offers an alternative understanding of the role of the prophet as "intermediary", bringing people into closer encounters with one another and with God.

Matthew Heesing, in pastoral ministry in Cochrane, Alberta, explores the connection between the biblical Exodus tradition, the ministry of Jesus, and contemporary resistance to "empire." Through detailed intertextual work, Matthew shows how the exodus tradition permeates the New Testament accounts of Jesus' ministry and offers a framework for Christians to both identify and stand against the power of "empire" today.

Ben Crosby, a Ph.D. student at McGill University, looks at another value dear to the heart of mainline Christians—inclusion. He argues that radical inclusion is central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but that it is intended to be a means, not an end. We need not only to strive to include people but to ask, "Included into what?" Christian inclusion is more than an openness to new members, it is a call to embrace a way of life—the way of Jesus.

Emily Carr, a minister from Langham, Saskatchewan, in "From the Heart" tells the story of conducting a funeral in her role as a hospital chaplain for a woman whose family firmly insisted that the service have absolutely no religious content. Through the experience she reflects on the meaning of suffering, grace and hope.

Neil Young has written a profile of Alfred Gandier, an early pioneer of the church union movement in Canada. This issue of *Touchstone* is rounded out with three book reviews.

Reading the work of these younger theologians has been a very encouraging experience for me as I ponder where the church is heading. The future of the North American churches, and the Protestant mainline in particular, seems very uncertain. Recent studies have shown that fifty years of slow slippage has turned into rapid collapse. The COVID 19 pandemic has turbocharged the decline of religious participation in a dramatic fashion.

Last summer I reread Pierre Berton's book *The Comfortable Pew,* which caused a massive stir when it was published in 1965. Berton was commissioned by the Anglican Church to write an honest appraisal of how the church appeared from an outsider's perspective. "Get with the times," was his message in a nutshell. Timely sermons on contemporary issues, upbeat music and down-to-earth clergy—that's what the church needs to appeal to a new generation, according to Berton.

And yet, the United Church has tried this strategy for over fifty years, but with little impact. Berton's prescription for revitalizing the church presupposed a culture in which people were naturally inclined to join a church if only they could find the right one. What's happening now is something much deeper, more fundamental than we have been willing to face—a massive rejection of participation in institutionalized religion.

The United Church of Canada's General Council has recently committed to planting a hundred new faith communities over the next ten years. I pray that this plan succeeds. But we are about three decades too late. Our denomination does not have a real strategy for church planting and has not trained the leaders who would be able to make it happen or created the infrastructure of support to sustain them. I fear that we are locked into a vision of church planting that has not really changed from the "new church development" model of the 60s, 70s and 80s.

I wonder if our calling in these times is simply to faithfully proclaim the Gospel, not in order to win back those who have deserted the church or to fill our pews and programs, but because that is what the church is called to do, regardless of the results it produces. The "success" of the church, according to the New Testament, is in God's hands, not ours. It's a

work of the Holy Spirit, not of institutional strategists or marketing experts. And while the Gospel will lead us to take a stand on the important issues facing our world, our message has to be more than anti-racism or climate action with a Christian veneer. The church needs to proclaim a distinctive message, different from the prevailing voices of our culture.

I'm reminded of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's response when someone asked if he was optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the church. "I believe Jesus is risen from the dead. Optimism or pessimism has nothing to do with it!"

That is how I approach the mission of *Touchstone.* It's remarkable in a way that our journal continues to thrive after forty years given today's religious and ecclesiastical environment when so many others have ceased publication. It's a testament to the dedication of so many people who contribute to *Touchstone* as a labour of love—our volunteer editorial staff, our Board, and our writers who keep on saying "Yes" when asked. That's why this issue, presenting the biblical and theological insights of younger authors, has been so gratifying to me, as I hope it will be for you.

We can't change the world. We can't revitalize the church. We won't convert multitudes. But we can continue to explore the Gospel of Jesus Christ with thoughtfulness and imagination. And prayerfully leave the results to God.

Paul Miller

THESE WOODS

By Mari Joerstad

When I was little, maybe six, I tried to make up my own religion. My parents are of the atheist/agnostic bent and we didn't attend church or any other religious gathering. But we lived in the Norwegian version of the Bible Belt. I lived 400 metres from the parish church, and though I can't remember religion being discussed at daycare, I am sure it was. I know it was, because one of the stories my family tells of me is about the time I realized my mom was pregnant with me when they got married, and scandalized, I said, "that means you mated before you were married!" Someone must have taught me about no sex before marriage, and it was not my parents. I assume other religious teachings made their way to me, even if there are no funny stories to remember them by.

I'm vague on the details of the religion I tried to invent. The image that comes to mind is a group of animals looking at me, with a lion in the middle. I wonder if I had read Narnia before I tried to invent the religion, but I think not, because my memory of Narnia is that I read it as a secret book about Christianity, a book from which I could learn about Jesus without telling my parents I was learning about Jesus. So I think the invented religion came before I encountered Narnia, but I can't be sure. Maybe I had watched the BBC Narnia series on TV.

Years later, when I was in InterVarsity and a more evangelical environment, I thought of this effort of mine as a clear sign I needed Jesus. A six year old so desperate for religion she was willing to create it for herself. What she needed was the Lord and Saviour! I don't think everything about that assessment is wrong, though I think it is not all right either. Or rather, it is incomplete. The "Lord and Savior" understanding of that moment attends only to what I was lacking, not to the positive content of what I imagined. Why was the central image of the religion I tried to make for myself a gathering of animals?

I grew up interested in things outside. I liked bugs. I liked spiders. I loved to swim in the ocean. I was a scout, though the Norwegian kind, which is less competitive, less badge oriented, and not segregated by gender. I learned how to build a fire, to improvise a stretcher, to catch and gut a fish, to orient using map and compass. I slept in tents with friends. And as my "you mated!" outburst suggests, I got my sex ed from nature documentaries.

My private religion never got off the ground, but I found my way into the parish church, or at least into the youth group. When I was seven,

a new parish priest arrived in town, and with him he brought three kids, Maria was my age, and another was my sisters' age. My mom dragged us all down to meet them. Maria, the middle child, became my best friend. Maria already knew Jesus and she was determined that I should know him too (plus, she wanted to save me from hell). Again, I struggle to remember the details, but what has stayed with me is her incredulity that I didn't believe in anything, as far as she could tell. This is not, of course, an accurate picture of atheism, but that seemed to be how she saw me. And slowly I came over to her way of thinking. At some point in elementary school, I converted to Christianity. You'd think that would solve it. I now had a religion. No need to make one up anymore. But it didn't. Not really.

Fast-forward and I am in a PhD program at Duke University, trying to iron out my dissertation topic. I had earlier written a paper about the ground in Genesis 4: it swallows Abel's blood and calls out to God. I was interested in the ways the soil resisted human violence, how it intervened in a human relationship by addressing God. I thought I would write about other instances of this in the Hebrew Bible. I had a clear dynamic, a well-defined limit for my thesis, and I sat down to read the whole Hebrew Bible in order to select my set of texts. It was like someone had opened the door.

I didn't find what I was looking for. The neat dynamic I was searching for was not there. What was there was maybe what my six year old self had been looking for. Not a gathering of animals, but a world alive in ways I could recognize in my marrow but had no language for. I found a wild array of texts that made no particular pattern, but spoke of a world in which everything, not just humans, lived their own lives and lived them before God.

> Here are some of the texts I found:
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> "God made the two big lights: the bigger light to rule the day and the smaller light to rule the night, and the stars" (Gen. 1:16).[1]
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> "Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths, all the days it lies desolate and you are in the land of your enemies. Then the land will pay off its sabbaths" (Lev. 26:34).
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> "I call to witness against you today the heavens and the earth…" (Deuteronomy 4:26).
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> "Prophecy concerning the soil of Israel and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, thus says the Lord YHWH…" (Ezekiel 36:6)
>
> "The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and

[1]All translations of biblical texts are my own.

withers…the new wine mourns, the vine languishes, all who are merry sigh" (Isaiah 24:4, 7)
"The trees of the field will clap their hands…" (Isaiah 55:12).
"Do not be afraid, O soil, be glad and rejoice. For YHWH has done great things. Do not be afraid, O animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness will be green, for the tree will carry its fruit and the fig and vine will give their strength" (Joel 2:22).
"The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2).
"If my soil has cried out against me and its furrows cried together, if I have eaten its strength without payment and I have made its lords breathe their last…" (Job 31:38-39).

This is a random sample of some of the texts I wrote about in my dissertation. The new limit I set for myself, one that was much less organized than the first one, was that I would write about texts in which other-than-animal nature (No humans! No animals!) performs actions, displays affect, or is addressed in a manner similar to how one addresses a person. Initially I worried I wouldn't have enough material to stretch to a whole dissertation, but that worry soon turned into a worry about how I was going to fit it all. There are so many texts!

I had learned, mostly indirectly and incrementally, that the texts I have quoted above and others like them are metaphors for human realities. The sun and the moon do not really rule. Fields don't observe sabbath. The heavens can't serve as witnesses. Trees don't clap and vines don't mourn. Nights don't speak to each other. No, humans do these things. The rule of the sun and the moon is a metaphor for human calendars. The field's sabbath is a metaphor for the sabbath of the farmer. Clapping trees speak of human joy. Plants may wither, but they don't feel grief. I had learned that this language was "just metaphor." The luminaries, plants, soils, hills and ravines—I could pass them right by. They were just screens for people. But I thought, what happens if I take this language seriously? What if the language of mourning and joy is real in some way? What if trees give their fruit the way I give presents? What if animals and plants and clouds and mountains communicate with God?

I don't mean I tried to take the language literally. There is plenty of metaphor here. Trees don't have hands to clap with. Tree hands are a metaphor. A literal reading is not, however, the only alternative to a

metaphor-for-humans reading. The alternative I pursued was a reading that asks: what does the metaphor of clapping trees say about *trees*? What do these texts say about how ancient Israelites lived in the world and understood other creatures? What if they really thought trees could feel joy and fear?

At first, I kept getting stuck on brains. Humans have brains and that, I thought, makes our actions real. We think about what we do. We can choose to do other things. We have will, not just instinct. Dogs also have brains, though they don't think the same way we do. The ratio of instinct to will is different, leaning in the direction of instinct. Still, it is easier to think of a dog mourning or being joyful than it is to think of a cedar showing joy, much less a cloud. I am used to thinking of a central nervous system, some amount of intelligence, and the ability to choose between options as the prerequisites for agency. I'm used to thinking of plants as a kind of machine, a biological one. Seeds do what they are "programmed" to do and nothing else. The sweet peas I've planted on my balcony do not "do" their growing in the same way I write this essay or make my kids lunch. They just grow because that's what their seeds do. Never mind clouds and mountains. Big puffs of vapour, huge collections of minerals, not doers in any way. Not alive.

A professor at Duke, Norman Wirzba, suggested that I read Tim Ingold's work. Tim Ingold is an anthropologist and has written about my worries about brains, or, as he calls it, "the problem of agency." The problem of agency, he says, is a "problem of our own making." How is it, we wonder, that humans can act? If we were mere lumps of matter, we could do nothing. So we think that some extra ingredient needs to be added to liven up our lumped bodies. And if, as sometimes seems to us, objects can 'act back', then this ingredient must be attributed to them as well. We give the name 'agency' to this ingredient.[2]

In his discussion of the problem of agency, Ingold mentions animism. I had never read about animism, but I thought of it as the belief that things have spirits that make them alive. This, it turns out, is close to the classical definition of animism offered by the father of modern anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor.[3] It is also very close to Ingold's description of the problem of agency. Whether it is humans or plants or

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[2] Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 16.

[3] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion Language, Art and Custom*, vol. I (London: J. Murray, 1873), 285, 287.

animals, you've got a lumpy body to which agency or spirit gives animation. But that's not how people think about animism anymore. At least not the experts. Ingold's book led me to the work of Graham Harvey. Here is how Harvey describes animists:

> Animists are people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in a relationship with others. Animism is lived out in various ways that are all about learning to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) towards and among other persons.[4]

To state the obvious, there's no talk of brains or agency here. The focus is on relationships. If something can relate, it is potentially a person. And if something can relate, I'm required to act respectfully towards it. Harvey leaves to the side the question of the "insides" of trees and clouds. It doesn't matter if something has a central nervous system. It matters how we live together. How I am cared for by trees and clouds. And there is no doubt that I am cared for by trees and clouds. If it stops raining, or if all the trees around me stop making oxygen, I would quickly die. That part is clear.

The writer that finally made this feel emotionally real to me is Robin Kimmerer, with her stories about strawberries. Strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at your feet. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery — as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source.[5]

I grew up picking berries, both farmed and wild (the latter I would thread on straws). And yet I had never thought to be grateful to a strawberry bush. Just a biological machine, right? Nothing to say thank you to here. Reading Kimmerer, I suddenly wondered, why? Why do I feel no obligation to be grateful to strawberry bushes? I love strawberries and I am utterly unable to make them myself. I could not build a machine that could make strawberries. Making strawberries is a skilled, difficult task, and only strawberry bushes do it.

A common phrase in the Bible is that trees and vines "will give their fruit" (or, if things are going badly, "will not give their fruit.") "Give"

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[4] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst & Co, 2005), xi.

[5] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 23–24.

in these cases is the same word used for humans giving each other things, and for God giving things. It turns out that as far as the Bible is concerned, trees (and strawberry bushes) aren't machines that churn out fruit. Trees give fruit, as gifts, and trees can withhold their fruit if they so wish. Every apple and peach, plum and blackberry, is a delicious gift.

Think about strawberries again, this time from the perspective of botany. A strawberry is technically not a berry, but an "aggregate accessory fruit," meaning the flesh of the strawberry is not from the plant's ovaries, its eggs, but is a receptacle that holds the ovaries, which sit in the little dimples across the fruit's surface. Strawberries grow this way because they want to be eaten. They want their babies to be eaten. Strawberries make a big, wonderful gift, red, shiny, and juicy, and on it they rest their babies, so that someone, one of us maybe, will come along, eat their babies, and take them to new places. The strawberry gets something out of it — a vehicle for the babies — but that "getting something" is itself an act of generosity. Can you imagine trusting a random passerby to eat and carry your babies to new fields? I can't! Strawberries as gifts are amazing to me, both because they are so normal and such a miracle. Here is this little plant and every summer it grows eatable jewels.

If my reading through the Bible, looking for texts like Genesis 4, was like the opening of a door, then the combined writings of Ingold, Harvey, and Kimmerer helped make sense of what was behind the door. Not logically, but relationally and emotionally. If I start with relationships, with my dependence on other beings, with the river of gifts I eat and breathe and walk among each day, then the question of brains fades away. New questions take its place.

For example, how do other beings make and take care of babies? That's what got me to think about strawberries and auxiliary fruits. Strawberries allow others to eat their babies! What about dandelions? They send their babies on the wind. Or flowers, depending on pollinators, and mosses capable of both cloning and sexual reproduction.[6] Once I started to think about what I need to live — food, shelter, family — and started to think of the analogous needs of other creatures, I saw many relationships. Not machines that happen to provide what I need, but creatures that together hold it all up. That provide for themselves and us with generosity and creativity.

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[6] To learn more about moss reproduction, see Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* (Corvallis: Oregon State University, 2003), 38–43.

My dissertation didn't get me the gathering of animals my child self had tried to invent, but it showed me a connection with the world that is also a connection with God.[7] We are not alone in seeking God or in worshipping God. The fields cry out to God, and the nights speak of Jesus. I don't mean I can hear them, only that I trust that they do. The New Creed says, "We are not alone, we live in God's world." As it turns out, the world is not God's possession in a passive way, it is God's world the way I am God's. It belongs to God in relationship, not in ownership. And we and the world belong together.

Now, when I think of children and religion, I think of my own kids. Almost two years ago my family and I moved to BC, so that I could begin a job at the Vancouver School of Theology. My oldest, Forest, was 2 and a half at the time. We like to hike, and Forest was used to North Carolinian woods. Oaks, sweetgum, dogwoods, redbuds, beech, and hickory. Bone white poplars, the otherworldly feeling of walking through rhododendron tunnels in fog.

Then we moved to BC. The trees here are different. We live right next to Pacific Spirit Park. The trees of Pacific Spirit are primarily Douglas fir, western red-cedar, and hemlock. Enormous trees. Twice as tall as what I think of as "normal trees," and much taller than a rhododendron stand. Their undergrowth is nothing like what grows under North Carolina's deciduous trees. The sounds of this forest are different.

For months after we moved here, Forest would tell me, if we entered the park, "I am a little bit scared of these woods." I understood what he meant. Even when it is full of people, it is silent. The trees are so grave. So old. So very present. And though I don't think they are hostile; they don't rush to friendship. It is best to be a little wary.

But I didn't want us to avoid Pacific Spirit Park. I needed to address Forest's fear. I wanted some way to show that though the forest may not be completely safe, we can travel there with care and respect. I suggested we introduce ourselves to the trees. It is a bit on the nose for someone whose dissertation elevator speech was "trees are people too." Forest liked the suggestion. Though he no longer asks to do it, for a long time he'd insist we introduce ourselves and state our purpose. He was strict about the rules. If I tried to say something like "it's Forest and mamma," he'd tell me to say my name (I'm not the trees' mamma!) Sometimes we had to introduce ourselves to every tree, sometimes one would do. It didn't

[7] The dissertation is published as Mari Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Nonhumans, and the Living Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2019).

immediately make Forest less scared, but it made it possible for him to enter the woods.

I didn't think of it then, but now I wonder if this is part of how I offer my kids religious education. Part of how I teach them to connect to the world, to be in it well, to live the role of one creature among many. I am a baby learner myself, and not a particularly skilled guide. But I want to try. I want to teach my kids the stories of God and God's people so that they see that it is a story of the whole world, not just the humans. That they are indeed surrounded by a circle of creatures, not just animals, but plants, clouds, and mountains too, all of us held and cared for by each other and by God.

"SAYING THE QUIET PART OUT LOUD": ETHOS, DOCTRINE, AND POWER

By Morgan Bell

Much reference is made to the "ethos" of The United Church of Canada (UCC) in the denomination's daily life and work. Mission and vision statements of various communities of faith, job descriptions for denominational positions, and candidates for ministry are all tested for their conformity to that ethos. Debates and discussions in the various courts of the church center around what is and is not in keeping with the ethos of the UCC. Indeed, some have strongly argued that ethos—rather than, say, doctrine—is more properly understood as the regulative canon for identity, action, and theology in the United Church.[1]

Curiously, however, little attention has been paid to the character and–at issue in this article–the function of "ethos" in the UCC.[2] In what follows, I critically examine the norming function of "ethos" in the day-to-day operations of The United Church of Canada. I consider the "canonical" or "regulative" function of ethos in the UCC. That is, I examine *how* ethos forms and disciplines the denomination and its members and the consequences of an ethos-based denominational self-understanding. I argue that ethos (often ill-defined) constitutes a form of intuitive, unspoken "insider knowledge" that disproportionately disorients and disciplines those who have not been long-socialized by the common life of the UCC. As a result, ethos is often deployed as a form of "soft power." —I submit that other, more explicit standards of churchly identity, belief, and practice–doctrine, policy, and polity–should operate as the regulative canons by which the UCC fulfils its call by God to be Christ's Church.

Ethos at Work: Dead Butterflies & Social Transgression

What precisely is "ethos"? How does ethos operate in, emerge from, regulate, and/or express the life and work of The United Church of

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[1] CBC News, "United Church about ethos, not belief, says minister who faces defrocking," *CBC News*, 9 September 2016, accessed 24 April 2023, *https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/united-church-1.3754549*.

[2] A notable exception is Stephen Willey's now-dated *Reflections on United Church ethos at the beginning of an era* (Vancouver: Chalmers Institute for Continuing Education and Congregational Development, 1999).

Canada? Gail Allan and Marilyn Legge define "ethos" as the church's "character and disposition," noting as I have above that "some would hold that the church operates more by ethos… than by doctrine."[3] In its vernacular usage in the UCC, "ethos" seems to denote a constellation of broad, loosely discernable social values and ideals ingredient to the UCC's identity. For instance, qualifiers are often added to "ethos" to identify some of those operative values: naming, for example, the church's "*social justice* ethos."[4] Put poetically, one might consider ethos as the "soul" of the UCC as a social body. Like a soul, ethos is the evolving, organic essence of the whole, the dynamic identity of the church in its worship, work, and witness.

For just that reason, any final attempt to provide a normative description of the UCC's ethos will fall short. Karl Barth wrote that "theology must describe the dynamic interrelationships which make [God's procession into history] comparable to a bird in flight, in contrast to a caged bird."[5] *Mutatis mutandis*, this holds for the church upon which God's Dove alights. Because ecclesiastical commentary must attend to the living church "in flight," any attempt to paint a portrait of it pales in comparison to the thing represented —especially when the social body in question is in faith confessed to be the Body of Christ. To use another naturalist simile: to pin down the exact character of a church's ethos would be akin to pinning a butterfly to cardstock for scientific inspection. One might learn much from examining the butterfly's body, but it has been drained of the life that makes it worth observing.

I suggest that ethos does not simply operate ostensively; it does not merely direct one's attention to a lively and observable social phenomenon that finally escapes fulsome representation. Ethos often functions in a *regulative* manner; it is used as a criterion for determining proper action, the intellectual and theological admissibility of various proposals put to the church, or the identarian authenticity of persons and bodies within the UCC (i.e., "being United Church enough"). In this usage, "ethos" has a more determinate character. It does not so much gesture

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[3] Gail Allan and Marilyn Legge, "Ecclesiology: 'Being The United Church of Canada,' in *The Theology of The United Church of Canada",* ed. Michael Bourgeois, Don Schweitzer, Robert C. Fennell (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2019), 173.

[4] "Outreach," Royal York Road United Church, access 4 May 2023, *https://www.ryru.ca/outreach*.

[5] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology,* trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 10.

towards an open-ended life shared together than as a tribunal before which all must pass muster.

Take, for a first and admittedly mundane example, the rental policies of some local communities of faith which state that "the church reserves the right to refuse access when the renter's aims and goals *do not match the ethos of the United Church of Canada*."[6] Individuals and groups that are deemed as not in keeping with the ethos of the UCC are refused access to and use of resources belonging to the local congregation, lest they compromise that community's mission or identity. The right of a local congregation to determine such access is not in dispute here; indeed, it is supported. What is of interest, however, is that *ethos* is the standard by which access is adjudicated. Notably, ethos (nebulous concept and reality that it necessarily is) is left undefined in these policies. It is therefore unclear as to how a disqualifying transgression of UCC ethos would be identified.

That alone raises a number of questions: how would an organization or individual external to the UCC have any way of divining the ethos of a body with which they do not have extensive or intimate familiarity? Who would be responsible for defining or at least adequately describing ethos? How would they do so? Why should ethos—rather than, say, a breach of identifiable UCC policies, doctrinal incongruity, or conflict with other tangible features of UCC operation and identity (e.g., the denominational or congregational vision and call)—serve as the canon by which denominational social integrity is protected?

Take the experiences of some ministers hailing from other denominations and countries and who seek admission to the order of ministry in the UCC.[7] Admittands are rightly subject to the church's

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[6] "Facilities Rental Policy and Fee Structure," St. Martin's United Church, accessed 30 April 2023, *http://www.stmartinsuc.com/files/rental.pdf*. See also: "Use of Facilities," Sylvan United Church, accessed 30 April 2023, *http://sylvanunited.ca/use-of-facilities/*.

[7] In preparing this article, I spoke to four ministers who have or who are currently seeking admission to the order of ministry in the UCC. All are immigrants to Canada. All are racialized by virtue of their skin colour and their relationship to the English language (e.g., they speak English as a secondary or tertiary language, speak with an accent other than those emerging from the Anglo-Canadian vernacular, etc.). All—at some juncture in their admission process, as well in other aspects of their ministry—were explicitly scrutinized for being out-of-step with the UCC's ethos. All asked that I refrain from naming them in this article or providing other identifying details for fear of professional reprisals. As a result, some identifying details

prayerful discernment and oversight and are responsible for demonstrating competence in the skills and gifts that the Church has recognized God demands of God's ministers.[8] Yet it is not clear—nor, if what I have written above holds, could it ever be made sufficiently clear—what constitutes the ethos of the UCC with which admittands are expected to be in line.

The admittands with whom I spoke expressed substantive (not simply essential!) agreement with the doctrine and polity of the UCC as it is articulated in *The Manual*, as well as other defining ethical stances of the UCC. They were surprised to discover, however, that not only did their local congregations often have a different expectation of their ministers than what is officially expected of ministers by the UCC (this is a common enough occurrence), but that the various courts and organs of the church did as well. One admittand was told they were "out of step" with the UCC's ethos by virtue of how they moved their body in worship (in their case, modulating volume and active gesticulation while preaching, and blessing the congregation with outstretched arms and hands faced palms-down at the benediction). Another was accused of going against the "spiritual ethos" of the UCC and of "sounding like a fundamentalist" for peppering their speech with Scripture and chapter-and-verse citations, though their accuser admitted they did not disagree with the substance of what the admittand had to say. Yet another was told that their Christology (which holds that there is a relationship of identity between Jesus of Nazareth and God the Son and as such confesses him as Lord) runs contrary to the "anti-imperialist ethos" of the UCC. (It is worth noting that this individual comes from and served in a country still struggling as a result of British imperialism, and their Christology consciously emerged from theological reflection upon those experiences.)

I take great exception to the views expressed above; these so-called concerns range from theologically dubious to subtly racist. However, my deeper interest is not *what* constitutes the ethos of the UCC

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in what follows have been redacted while still striving to convey the essence of their experiences.

[8] It is intriguing to note, however, that the learning outcomes expected of admittands differs from those seeking ordination, commissioning, or recognition from within the UCC. See: Office of Vocation, *Learning Outcomes for Admission Ministers*, 11 September 2019, accessed 28 April 2023*, https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/learning-outcomes-admission-ministers.pdf*.; Office of Vocation, *Candidacy Pathway: Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership,* 11 September 2019, accessed 28 April 2023, *https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/learning-outcomes-ministry-leadership.pdf*.

but rather *how* it operates in a regulative fashion. The previous examples illustrate that it is difficult to come to a functional knowledge of ethos without extensive experience with the UCC for a number of years. They somehow failed to reflect the "aesthetic" of the UCC: to move their bodies in recognizable ways, to speak in a certain manner, to perform in a way palatable to dominant tastes, to resemble the UCC as others experience it. Neither they nor those who levied critiques could adequately or articulately explain what their perceived failures were. Indeed, these admittands noted that when their accusers were confronted, the accusers generally backed down and neglected to provide any further explanation.

What these troubling anecdotes suggest is that those unaffiliated with the UCC, or latecomers to it, are both potentially and in practice disciplined for "misunderstanding" or failing to comply with an "ethos" that is malleable. The problem at hand is not whether the UCC has or should have an ethos; it unquestionably does. The problem is its regulative deployment; the way it is marshalled to police communal norms and practices. At issue, therefore, is the exercise of power. I suspect that "ethos" is used in the ways described above and prized as a unifying concept for UCC identity primarily because it *seems* a less rigid and exacting standard to expect of members, adherents, and clergy.[9] It is a *softer* form of power. In many ways, this position is understandable. Rather than confession of a common creedal statement or demanding substantive doctrinal conformity on a number of key dogmatic loci,[10] UCC reliance on ethos seems to be tied up with the "big tent" self-understanding of the denomination: if one can go with the grain of how the UCC tends to "be the church," that is sufficient to justify one's active presence within the UCC. This flexibility in some ways extends the pragmatic ecumenism that characterized the UCC at its founding per the old adage: "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

But however soft ethos may be, soft power is power, nonetheless. The exercise of power (as I will explore below) is not by necessity a threatening or insidious thing. As Michel Foucault famously put it, "my point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which

[9] Rev. Gretta Vosper suggests this in the article cited above.

[10] John Young rightly notes, however, that "contrary to popular opinion in some quarters" the church's demand that ministers be in "essential agreement" with its doctrine, "far from being a casual approach to doctrine, was one of greater, rather than less, rigour when it came to the theological examination of candidates for ministry." Idem., "Introduction" in *The Theology of the United Church of Canada,* 3.

is not exactly the same as bad."[11] We thus do well to examine how ethos functions as a normative standard in the UCC and the potential and real dangers it poses.

Ethos and Social Discipline

Ethos, as I have described its operations above, bears much affinity with sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's post-Augustinian conception of "habitus."[12] "Habitus," for Bourdieu, is "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception."[13] "Habitus" is thus a loose term; it names a slippery, difficult-to-pin-down mode of governing and producing social behaviour. It is, as one interpreter puts it, "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu."[14] Habitus—as its etymology suggests—has to do with *habits*: forms of thinking, practice, and feeling to which subjects become *habituated* according to the largely unspoken, assumed norms and worldview of a social body.

Habitus, then, is the process by which subjects are socialized to act, think, speak, and move in a way that conforms to the social body's dominant values and norms. While one may posteriorly reflect on and analyze action, thought, speech, and movement, habituated activity occurs reflexively. Natalie Wigg-Stevenson provides a helpful liturgical example of a habitus at work. Her former congregation would always dim the sanctuary's lights at the beginning of the sacrament of baptism to signal a shift in atmosphere as God added more to the church's number. The first

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[11] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics" in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* eds. H.L. Dreyfus & P. Rainbow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 231f.

[12] For an analysis of Augustine of Hippo's pioneering and unique use of the category, see: Isabelle Bochet, "Habitus According to Augustine: Philosophical Tradition and Biblical Exegesis" in *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits in Medieval Philosophy,* eds. N. Faucher & M. Roques (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 47-66.

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 86.

[14] Loïc Wacquant, "Habitus" in *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology,* eds. J. Becket & Z. Milan (London: Routledge, 2005), 316.

time Wigg-Stevenson experienced this; she was confused as to what was happening.

> But over the following years, that cue trained me to respond. If I am distracted or disengaged, dimming lights immediately draw my attention to the tank at the front and center of the sanctuary. It is not as though the lights dim and I think consciously, "Oh, it's time for a baptism. I had better look front and center now so that I can see the baptism." But more so, when the lights dim, I find myself instinctively leaning slightly forward in my pew for a better view before I have even had time to register what has happened.[15]

Over time, Wigg-Stevenson is formed and reformed as a worshipping subject through a series of repeated experiences. They instill in her the community's anticipation, expectation, elevated attention, and sacramental piety. The church's theology of baptism, its unspoken beliefs about God's activity at the font, and its focus on initiation are all subtly engrained into her over time. None of this happens at a discursive level; no one takes her aside to explain the significance and symbolism of dimmed lights relative to baptism. Rather, the practices and norms of a community simply do their work on her: the liturgy moulds her into an "insider" who intuitively "gets" what is happening.

This is a helpful parable that sheds light on ethos' operation. Ethos is a largely *intuitive* phenomenon. It is instilled through unspoken cues, formed instincts, and the cultivation of expectation. It is the knowledge of insiders who come to know instinctively what is right and wrong in the community, how things are and are not to be done, what its inchoate character is and is not. That intuition comes about, however, through extensive socialization: patterns, repetitions, rituals, expectations, and practices. Through continual performance of ethos—from speaking in a certain way (e.g., the United Church lexicon often means little to outsiders), to sung hymnody, to unspoken relational expectations at meetings of the various courts of the church—ethos becomes engrained in subjects. Indeed, ethos *produces* subjects: persons capable of propagating and creatively bearing forward the church's ethos.

None of this is especially pernicious. Indeed, the formation and reformation of subjects according to the Church's shared life as arranged

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[15] Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 50f.

by the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a means by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies human creatures.[16] Danger arises, however, when ethos as a non-discursive "insider knowledge" becomes the enforced yet unspeakable criterion by which persons are disciplined and chastised. To say that one is not "in line" with the ethos of the UCC amounts to little more than saying "that's just not how things are done here." It is paramount that this exercise of discipline be public, explicable, and accountable. Without those features, the exercise of disciplinary power runs the risk of mirroring and replicating the theological dubiousness, White supremacy, and other sinful modes of social exclusion operative in the stories of the admittands shared above.

This is so because, conceptually speaking, ethos is made to do work for which it is eminently ill-suited. That persons and congregations should become more deeply engrained with the ethos of the UCC is indeed a hope worth having—put in Pauline fashion, that is simply to hope that the Church would be "of the same mind." But absorption and creative extension of the UCC's ethos is the *product* of partnership or membership and ministry, not their precondition. This is the case not only because "alignment to the church's ethos" is nowhere to be found in the UCC's policy as a prerequisite for baptism, belonging, membership, or partnership, but because as a form of socialized, embodied knowledge, formation by and habituated action according to the UCC's ethos can *only* result from extensive and involved engagement in the life of the church.

But if ethos is conceptually malapropos for a regulative, disciplinary function, what standards *should* the UCC turn toward in its stead? In what remains, I argue that the explicit canons of the church—doctrine and polity, subordinate to Scripture—should be the regulative standards by which the Church orders its common life together.

Bringing power to light

Thus far, I have examined what I perceive as the dangers of using ethos as a "soft power" by which to structure UCC identity. "Soft power," I have argued, is nonetheless *real* power—and all the more dangerous given that

[16] This conception of churchly life finds particular expression in the thought of many postliberal theologians. See: George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward A Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), esp. 129-152. In a slightly different vein, see also: Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

it operates in ways that are elusive and difficult to name. Power is always dangerous, Foucault astutely observed. But he further noted that power is also an inevitable, necessary, and often generative force:

> It is necessary once and for all that we cease describing the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes," it "represses," it "controls," it "censors," it "abstracts," it "masks," it "hides." In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that can be taken from him arise from this production.[17]

The question is not *whether* to exercise power to secure the church's integrity and preserve its practice; this is neither avoidable nor a nefarious activity *in se.* The question is rather: by what regulative standards will the church order its life? I argue those standards are the UCC's doctrine and polity, as they stand subordinate to the living God's ongoing address to the church through Holy Scripture.

"Doctrine" is an unpopular word in the present day, connected as it is with attitudes and practices that smack of the "doctrinaire." Be that as it may, doctrine—*doctrina,* the church's teaching—has an indispensable function in the life of Christ's people. Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, two of the most creative and influential voices of the Reformed tradition since John Calvin, disagreed on much, but on at least this they were of one mind: doctrine continually clarifies and normatively sets forth the Church's teaching and confession.[18] Doctrine serves to "say the quiet part out loud"; to set forth in language and continually adumbrate the faith by which Christ binds his church together. In the UCC, the subordinate standards (i.e., our doctrine) are the only conciliarly agreed upon standards

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[17] Michel Foucault, *Surveillir et punir* (Paris : Gallimard, 1975), 227. Translation mine.

[18] Schleiermacher held that "Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech." (Idem., *The Christian Religion,* ed. H.R. Mackintosh & J.S. Stewart (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), § 15.) Barth, skeptical of Schleiermacher's perceived subjectivism, held that dogmatics (as the critical investigation of doctrine) "is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God. (Idem., *Church Dogmatics,* vol. I/1 (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2009), §1). Both, however, agree that doctrine sets forth the Church's teaching in a discursive and examinable fashion, making plain (and therefore open to reconsideration) the confession of God's people.

which hold our communion together; any one individual's "gut sense" of what constitutes the ethos of the denomination simply does not command the authority that the Church's discernment as enshrined through remit does. Articulating its faith doctrinally, the Church makes explicit the norms and guideposts by which it orders its common life according to the Gospel.

The doctrinal enterprise is thus an avenue by which the Risen Lord puts to work the baptized imagination of those who are being brought to have the same mind as Christ. To be sure, doctrine remains a human enterprise and, as with all creaturely endeavours, marred by sin. Even so, as Lutheran theologian Christine Helmer puts it, "doctrine presses toward knowledge and truth while at the same time remaining cognizant of its human origins and historical particularity."[19] Doctrine is the historically contingent intellectual response of sinners to the redeeming God who meet us in Jesus Christ. It is not Holy Writ; it is not the Word-made-flesh. It is subject to change and challenge. Indeed, this sensibility informed the drafters of the UCC's earliest subordinate standard.[20]

In this way, to state the church's expectations and to plainly profess its common faith with identifiable content in doctrine (and correlatively in polity) renders those same expectations subject to scrutiny, contest, and revision. In this way, doctrine is clear but not necessarily rigid or closed. Doctrinal formulation is an ongoing project; a churchly practice. Kathryn Tanner notes that "Christian practices are ones in which people participate together in an argument over how to elaborate the claims, feelings, and forms of action around which Christian life revolves."[21] Just that extended argument is what Christians call "tradition"——the diachronic existence of the church; that history in which a community bound to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit continually confesses and contests its common faith. It is for this reason among others that God raises up successive generations of theologians (broadly conceived): to undertake a loyal "critique and correction of [the Church's] discourse in the light of the norm she [the Church] sees as the presence of God to the Church, in obedience to God's grace."[22]

Explicitly setting forth the church's expectations and teaching,

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[19] Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 165.

[20] See: T.B. Kilpatrick, *Our Common Faith* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1928), 62ff.

[21] Tanner, 125.

[22] Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology,* ed. G. Hunsinger & W.C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 39.

then, does not dilute the church's power. Instead, it *clarifies* that power. It opens it to dispute. It gives individuals and groups a foothold by which to climb to the church's peak and survey the whole. It heuristically objectifies the church's time-bound confession such that, as the people of God gather under the Scriptures in obedience and faith, we might subject even our dearest and most taken-for-granted beliefs and expectations to the Word by which God puts to death and makes alive (1Sam 2:6). In other words, it makes those individuals and groups aware of that for which they are accountable, and it facilitates the accountability of the church for the ways in which it disciplines and oversees its membership and conducts its partnerships.

Doctrine, of course, does not say all that must be said.[23] It is not binding for those with whom the UCC partners, nor is confession of its doctrine required of its members. In the UCC, it is left to the Office of Vocation to discern ministers' conformity to doctrine. What doctrine does, however, is articulate the central tenets of the Church's teaching; it enables others to identify the central programme of the church as a social body. It is binding for the church *as a whole*. From Scripture and our common doctrine emerge a vision of a life God demands of her people. As a result, the UCC develops polity and policies that openly govern the life of the church. Like doctrine, these present and clarify the duties, privileges, and parameters of the church's clergy, members, and adherents. Like doctrine, they are open to contest and revision. Like doctrine, they structure and work with other norming forces to produce the denomination's ethos.

But their difference from ethos is important. To borrow language from another sphere, doctrine, polity, and policy render the church's identity, charisms, and expectations *public*, *intentional*, and *explicit*. To return to Foucault, reliance on these communal standards does not eradicate the dangers associated with the exercise of power. It does, however, bring those dangers into the light of day; witnessing to Christ's disquieting promise that "nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light" (Lk 8:17).

[23] Indeed, many of the central doctrines of the ecumenical Church are notably spare: the Chalcedonian definition does not state *how* Christ's two natures coinhere, simply how they do not; the Church has never definitively stated the exact manner by which Christ redeems humanity.

EXODUS, JESUS, AND US: EXAMINING CREATIVITY AS THE PRIMARY INGREDIENT FOR RESISTING EMPIRE

By Matthew Heesing

Introduction: Exodus, Jesus, and Us

In my pastoral ministry, I teach an intensive ten-week course titled *Exodus, Jesus and Us: A Roadmap for Revolution*. The aim of this course is to point out the profound connections between the narrative of the Book of Exodus, the life and ministry of Jesus, and our own twenty-first-century contexts. Much has been written regarding the theological and literary connections between Jesus and Moses, especially in regard to the Jewish-oriented Gospel of Matthew. The Exodus event has also resonated with countless groups of people wrestling with systems of domination and bonds—literal, financial, political, etc.—of captivity.[1] Other resources have drawn parallels between Exodus and contemporary "empires,"[2] or the counter-imperial intentions and consequences of Jesus and the early church.[3] Few works, however, use Exodus as a prism for interpreting

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[1] The World Alliance of Reformed Churches defines "empire" as "convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic and military imperial interests, systems and networks that seek to dominate political power and economic wealth. It typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities and countries to the more powerful. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states and either marginalizes or co-opts religious communities" (World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, 24th General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Accra, Ghana, October 2004).

[2] A notable comprehensive example in this vein is Laurel A. Dykstra, *Set Them Free: The Other Side of Exodus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). See also Walter Brueggemann's recent two-part examination of Exodus (Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered Out of Empire*, Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part One [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021]; Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered into Covenant*, Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part Two [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021]).

[3] Many works by John Dominic Crossan, for example, would fit into this category, chief among them *God & Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperOne, 2007). See also works by Richard Horsley (including *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006]), Hans Leander (*Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark from a Postcolonial Perspective* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013]), and Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

Jesus' ministry, especially in terms of what it means to faithfully live in the midst of multiple "empires" right now.[4] Yet, as I argue in the course, the less we grasp the Exodus event, the more elusive and domesticated Jesus will ultimately be to us and to our ways of living.

Holding these three main threads—Exodus, Jesus, and us—closely together, this course attempts to offer a comprehensive and detailed foundation, or "road map," *from which* to build more specific movements for social change. Following an introductory session, participants learn to recognize three pervasive pillars of Empire (Existential Anxiety, Exploitation, Exhaustion), practise three key ingredients for Resistance (Creativity, Contestation, and Commemoration), and pursue three main stages of Liberation (Release, Reformation, and Responsibility). In this article I will focus on the first part of the second trilogy of sessions: *Creativity* as the primary ingredient for resisting Empire.

Resistance to Empire: Creation Motifs in Exodus

In his article "Jesus and Empire: Then and Now," Néstor Miguez writes,

> To locate ourselves in spaces of hope is to begin working beyond Empire. It is to create life-giving alternatives for everyone …. But for this faith to become reality we cannot wait for time to pass and for the governing powers to fall by themselves. It is necessary to begin to demonstrate in our perceptions, relationships, and communities that another world is possible; that other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude…[5]

Books, 1988).

[4] See Brueggemann's two-part examination of Exodus. See also Ched Myers Russell Powell, "Exodus in the Life and Death of Jesus," in *Freedom Journeys: The Tale of Exodus and Wilderness Across Millennia*, 203-09, edited by Arthur Ocean Waskow and Phyllis Ocean Berman. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2012; Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); and Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

[5] Néstor Miguez, "Jesus and Empire: Then and Now," in The United Church of Canada, "Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire," 2007, 49-54, *http://www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/policies/2006/pdf/w43.pdf.*

To live into the Gospel hope—the hope that "another world is possible"—is to deliberately choose to move against the flow of the current status quo: to work "beyond Empire" through a proactive counter-assertion of life, dignity, and abundance for all. To help make this hope more of a reality, to "locate ourselves in spaces of hope," means to practise *resistance* to Empire.

We see this spirit of resistance almost immediately at work in the opening chapters of Exodus. When the king of Egypt, out of a sense of existential anxiety, instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys upon delivery, the midwives choose instead to let the boys live (Ex. 1:15-18). Empire, through Pharaoh, makes a command, but the midwives proceed to resist. In the process, the midwives support and foster hope—life—literally, *new creation*—where empire had attempted to stamp it out instead.

Following this, a "Levite woman" conceives and gives birth to a son: a "fine" or "beautiful" child. "When she could hide him no longer," the narrative continues, "she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile" (Ex. 2:1-3). Once again, an act of resistance to empire is detailed here.

Moreover, beneath the surface of these two incidents are a number of textual allusions to other scriptural narratives of creation and re-creation.[6] First, the word "fine"—for the child later known as Moses—is the Hebrew word *tov*, or "good." More accurately, the line should read something like "When she saw that this child was *good*," with both the notion of sight *and* "good" creating an intentional call-back to the refrain repeated all throughout Genesis 1: "God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10b, 12b, 18, 21b, 25b, cf. 1:4, 1:30b).

In addition, the word used for papyrus "basket," *tevah*, is only used in one other place deliberately evoking the "ark" of Noah. Just as Noah, his family, and the animals are put in an "ark"—a vessel of new creation

[6] Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, WJK Interpretation Series (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010); John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987); Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), and Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000); and Peter Enns, *Exodus for Normal People: A Guide to the Story—and History—of the Second Book of the Bible*, The Bible for Normal People (Perkiomenville, PA: The Bible for Normal People, 2021), 133).

that protects from chaotic waters—so, Moses is put in a "basket," connecting the act of resistance inherent in Moses' story with both the story of Creation (Gen 1) *and* the story of re-creation after the flood.

The midwives' resistance leads to this conclusion: ". . . and the people multiplied and became very strong" (Ex. 1:20). The word "multiplied" here, much like "good" and "basket," functions as a call-back to the initial creation story, and the command to human beings to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). These opening acts of resistance—the people increasing, the midwives' choice, the birth of Moses—function as echoes of creation or re-creation stories throughout the Exodus account.

Other creation or re-creation allusions in the Exodus narrative include the Hebrews' harsh labor in the fields, and pain in childbirth, a reference to the consequences faced by Adam and Eve outside of Eden (Gen. 3:16-19). In Exodus 2:24, it says that "God remembered," which is the same phrase we find near the end of the Flood account (Gen 8:1), the saving of Lot from destruction (Gen 19:29) (part of God's creation of the people of Israel through Abram and Sarai), and the story of God opening Leah's womb (Gen 30:22) to allow this new creation to take form. Subtle parallels are drawn between the opening words of Pharaoh (whose imperial symbol was the cobra) in Exodus 1:10 ("Come, let us deal shrewdly with them") and the snake in Genesis 3:1, ("more crafty than any of the wild animals") both of whom attempt to thwart creation from flourishing. Commentators have noted the resonance between the plagues and the pattern of chaos and order in Genesis 1.[7]

Later, the waters of the Red Sea are "divided in two and turned into dry land" (Ex. 14:21-22), the same language also used in Genesis 1:9, when God separated the waters so that dry land could appear. Emphasizing the allusion further, the waters of the Red Sea are driven back by "strong east winds," using the same Hebrew word—*ruach*—from when the "spirit of God hovered over the face of the water" (Gen 1:2). As Pete Enns writes, the crossing of the Red Sea is a "mini replay of creation."[8] Put otherwise, there's a *new creation* taking place throughout the narrative of Exodus; in the Exodus, a *creative process* is at play.

Resistance to Empire: Creation Motifs in the Gospels

A similar new creation dynamic can be found throughout the Gospels. The

[7] E.g., "The stories of creation, the flood, the plagues, and the Red Sea are meant to be read in light of each other, to interpret each other," writes Peter Enns (Enns, *Exodus for Normal* People, 107).

[8] Ibid., 133.

opening verses of John's Gospel are a deliberate echo of Genesis 1: "In the beginning was the Word . . . All things came into being through the Word . . . The light shines in the darkness . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (see John 1:1-14). References to all things coming "into being," to "life" and "light" (cf. Gen 1:3) and even the phrase "dwelt among us" (cf. Gen 3:8), imply that, for John, there is something about the person, life, and ministry of Jesus that is inherently tied not just to creation itself, but to the very process *of* creation. As in the narrative of Exodus, a *creative act* is perceived to be at play in and through Jesus, the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14): a claim that will become even clearer by the end of John's Gospel.

Creation motifs are further developed in John's description of Jesus' baptism (John 1:32-34). As in Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, and Luke 3:22, the Spirit descended "like a dove" upon Jesus while he was in the waters of the Jordan. The image of a bird descending over water reflects the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2, in which the "Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," especially since the Hebrew word for "hovering" is also the word for the flapping of a bird's wings.[9] In addition, the mention of a dove evokes the re-creation story of Genesis 8:10, when a "dove" was sent out from the ark. Occurring immediately before Jesus begins his ministry—a ministry that surely demonstrated that "another world is possible; that other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude"[10]—this story of baptism is intimately linked to the first moments of all creation *and* the first moments of re-creation as recounted in Genesis.

Other references to creation and re-creation in the Gospels include the intentional designation of the lake of Galilee as a "sea,"[11] the sending

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[9] See the usage of the same Hebrew word *merahefet*, from the verb "to hover," in Deut. 32:11, describing an eagle "hovering" above its young. But the word can also mean "to flutter." In *Midrash Rabbah,* Rabbi Simeon ben Zoma says, "The Spirit of the water blew' is not what is written, but rather, 'The spirit of God hovered' like a bird which is flying and flapping its wings…" (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Vol 1: Genesis* trans. H. Freedman London: Soncino, 1939), *https://ia800500.us.archive.org/13/items/RabbaGenesis/midrashrabbahgen027557mbp.pdf, 66.*

[10] Miguez, "Jesus and Empire," 54.

[11] E.g., "Using 'sea' rather than 'lake' allows the Markan narrative to evoke the chaos and anticreation motif associated with 'sea' in ancient Near Eastern imagery and the Hebrew Scriptures" (M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library [Louisville: John Knox Press,

out of the disciples "two by two" (Mark 6:7) for reasons, surely, of safety, testimony, and collaboration, but also, perhaps, as a deliberate allusion to the pairs of animals in Genesis 19:17-19, both chosen pro-creators of re-creation, the first-fruits and heralds of a new world; the "appointing" of the Twelve in Mark 3:14 and its linguistic overtones of Genesis 1-2;[12] and even the noticeable speech-act pattern of Jesus (e.g. Jesus speaks and the action instantly occurs), especially in Mark, paralleling the authoritative speech-act pattern of God in Genesis 1 (e.g. "God said . . . and there was . . . "). In John, seven "signs"—in part, alluding to the seven days of creation in Genesis 1-2—also point to the nature of Jesus' identity and ministry.[13]

Most significant, however, is this motif of creation in the Gospel of John: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance" (John 20:1). John presents the resurrection of Jesus as the culmination of a creative process. With the phrase "early on the first day of the week," echoing Gen 1-2, John makes the claim that everything Jesus has done up to this point has been a whole "week" of re-creation, and that we, in the light of the resurrection, are now living into what Jesus "finished."[14] In John 19:30, on the literal day "six" of the week, Jesus proclaims "It is finished," dies (and "rests") on day "seven" (cf. Gen 2:2*)*. Mary mistakes the resurrected Jesus as a "gardener" (John 20:15), a deliberate allusion to the garden of Eden (Gen 1:15).[15] Marianne Meye Thompson suggests that Jesus "breathing" on the disciples in John 20:22 may echo "God breathing the breath of life into humankind" in Genesis 2:7.[16] Through these literary constructs, John drives home the claim that

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2006], 58).

[12] "Since [the verb "appointed"] is "used repeatedly for God's act of creation in Gen 1-2 and elsewhere, it may also have the overtones of a new creative act" (Boring, *Mark*, 100).

[13] John 2:1-11; John 4:46-54; John 5:1-15; John 6:5-14; John 6:16-24; John 9:1-7; John 11:45, with an eighth "sign" implied to be the resurrection and the start of a new creation has taken place.

[14] For a more detailed examination of "new creation theology," specifically concerning John, cf. "The Word: Creation and New Creation" in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 336-53.

[15] Cf. the presentation of Jesus as a "new" or second "Adam" in 1 Cor 15:45, among other Pauline "new creation references.

[16] Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Breath of Life: John 20:22-23 Once More," in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honour of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham Stanton et al, 69-78 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004)

all of Jesus' life and work—work that was a resistance to empire—was an *act of re-creation*. "If anyone is in Christ," Paul writes, "they are a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

These intertextual allusions between Genesis, Exodus and the Gospels, are not a novel discovery. What is new, is the argument that these accounts not only echo creation but promote resistance to empire. Resistance to empire is itself an act of new creation. One might even go so far as to say that *resistance requires creativity*: that in Exodus and Jesus *creativity* is a primary feature of resistance.[17]

Resistance to Empire: Creativity

Resistance—"demonstrating . . . that another world is possible"—requires creativity. The first step in "working beyond Empire" is to envision an alternative, to imaginatively stepping outside of the familiar construct of the status quo. Resistance begins when we realize that things do not *have to* be this way and that "other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude."[18] As Naomi Klein writes, "The interplay between lofty dreams and earthly victories has always been at the heart of moments of deep transformation . . . . when people dared to dream big, out loud, in public—*explosions of utopian imagination*."[19] While many recent movements for social change have been clear on their "no," Klein expands, "It is *this imaginative capacity*, the ability to envision a world radically from the present, that has been largely missing . . . . a clear and captivating vision of the world *beyond* that no."[20]

Creativity, as the stories of Exodus and Jesus demonstrate, brings us beyond the "no." One powerful example of how Jesus' teachings on resistance were grounded in creativity is Matthew 5:38-41:[21]

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[17] In my course, *Exodus, Jesus, and Us*, I highlight two other successive key ingredients for any movement of resistance: contestation and commemoration.

[18] Miguez, "Jesus and Empire," 54.

[19] Naomi Klein, *No is Not Enough: Resisting the New Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 217, emphasis. added.

[20] Ibid., 220, emphasis. added.

[21] Other examples abound, not least among them Jesus' use of parables. "A parable is meant to allow you to *imaginatively* re-experience reality," writes Bernard Brandon Scott, quoted in David M. Felten and Jeff Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 216, emphasis added; Felten and Procter-Murphy continue, "Jesus' use of parables . . . caused the hearers to *creatively*

> You have heard it said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

On the surface, this excerpt appears to contradict any argument that Jesus came to resist Empire: "do not resist the one who is evil." However, as Walter Wink points out, the word "resist" —*antistenai*— refers to riots, insurrections, or armed revolution. It does not imply passivity or submissiveness, but retaliation, forceful resistance through violent and destructive means. A closer translation of this passage, Wink argues, ought to be "Do not retaliate against violence with violence," or "Do not resist one who is evil *through* violent means."[22]

Taken in this light, between fight or flight, violence or passivity, Jesus creatively offers what Wink calls "a third way" forward: the way of nonviolent resistance. The rest of the passage from Matthew 5 develops this creative mode of resistance, starting with the well-known adage to "turn the other cheek." Whereas this instruction has typically been interpreted in support of passive compliance, or even in offering one's self up for further abuse, Wink proposes precisely the opposite, since striking someone on the right cheek with the back of one's right hand was a standard way of reprimanding lower-class subjects, turning the other cheek—hiding one's right cheek and exposing one's left cheek—puts the aggressor in a bind. To slap with one's palm would signal social equality; to slap with one's left hand would make one unclean. "The powerful person has been stripped of his power to dehumanize the other," writes Wink.[23]

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experience a new reality . . . . The story transports hearers to a place of vulnerability, exposing them to a *previously unimagined alternative view of life"* (ibid., emphasis added). In *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination,* Walter Brueggemann writes, "Jesus, in his parables, told new stories that gave fresh slant to reality and generated *new possibility* among those who heard him. His parables are indeed a *mode of the prophetic, imagining new possibilities*" (Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2012], 41, emphasis. added).

[22] Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 10-11.

[23] Ibid., 16.

Turning the cheek creatively demonstrates defiance in the face of dehumanization, presenting one's self as a social equal, worthy of dignity and worth, without raising even one violent finger in response.

We find a similar dynamic in the instructions to "let him have your cloak" and "go with him two miles." The former, in the context of financial and legal exploitation, invites oppressed individuals to literally march out of court completely naked, publicly unmasking practices of destitution and profiteering. Shame would thus be shifted from the accused to the creditors, court and moneylenders, all the while making the exploitative laws a "laughing stock."[24] In the latter case, laws of impressment forced anyone to shoulder a soldier's military pack for a single mile. More than one mile would result in the soldier receiving punishment from their superior. Jesus, however, suggests that, rather than only submitting to one mile, express your own dignity and agency and travel two. One would have signalled resignation; two would be an assertive surprise, shifting the balance of power and disorienting the status quo. Imagine, Wink writes, an infantryman pleading with a Jew to immediately return his pack![25] Jesus proposes a creative way for the oppressed to recover the initiative, to seize for themselves the power of choice within a larger context of oppression that cannot—for the time being—be completely changed: "to *begin* to demonstrate," returning to Miguez, "that other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude."[26]

Jesus offers not just three ways to creatively practise resistance, but a template, a model for thinking.[27] He invites us with these three possible examples to reflect on our own situation; to look at the principles he proposes and ponder what might be required in other contexts of oppression. In the midst of the pandemonium of a turned cheek, a naked display, an unexpected mile, new perspectives and possibilities are presented. At the very least, oppression is *exposed*. More than that, however, empire can be opposed without being mirrored; the oppressor can be resisted without being emulated; power can be disarmed without

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[24] Ibid., 21.

[25] Ibid., 25. What also comes to mind here is the notion of "creative dislocation," used by Robert McAfee Brown, *Creative Dislocation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980).

[26] Miguez, "Jesus and Empire," 54.

[27] "Turn the other cheek" is not intended as a legal requirement to be applied woodenly in every situation, but as the impetus for discovering *creative alternatives* that transcend the only two that we are conditioned to perceive: submission or violence, flight or fight" (Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence*, 34-35, emphasis. added).

retaliating with violence. Which raises the question: how might *we* nonviolently resist? What would turning the cheek, stripping naked, walking an extra mile—what might *our* excuse, our basket covered with tar and pitch, our own being fruitful and multiplying—*look like* in our world and in our many empires today?

The answers to these questions are endless. The website *Beautiful Trouble* offers an open-source "Toolbox" with dozens of tactics for the art—and it is a *creative* art—of nonviolent resistance, including nudity, artistic vigils, guerilla theatre, hashtags, storytelling, and more.[28] The website *Waging Nonviolence* also features stories of creative nonviolent resistance, from the street-walkers of Swidnik, Poland,[29] to the toy-demonstrators of Barnau, Siberia,[30] to the pothole-fillers of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.[31] Similar to the function of Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5, and "[in] contrast to marches or other 'top-down' organized protests," writes James VanHise, "these *creative* nonviolent tactics have the potential to harness the *imaginations* and dynamism of more people in the community as they take ownership and become *co-creators* of their actions."[32] While far removed from the contexts of Exodus and of Jesus, such recent examples bring to life for *us* the creative spirit and principles already present in these scriptural narratives of resistance to empire.

Indeed, the stories of Exodus and of Jesus teach us that resistance is inherently an act of creation. To resist is to engage in the work of re-creation. Resistance *requires* a spirit of creativity, right from the *start*—to imagine alternatives to the status quo, to initially conceive of and believe that "another world is possible"—and at *every step of the way*, in order to actually "create life-giving alternatives for everyone."

May it be so!

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[28] *https://beautifultrouble.org/toolbox/tactic.*

[29] James L. VanHise, "New research shows the power of putting your opponent in a bind," *Waging Nonviolence*, Sept 16, 2021, *https://wagingnonviolence.org/2021/09/new-research-shows-power-dilemma-actions/.*

[30] Ibid.

[31] James L. VanHise, "How creative protests to improve everyday life in Zimbabwe circumvent repression," *Waging Nonviolence*, April 27, 2019, *https://wagingnonviolence.org/2019/04/locals-creative-tactics-city-services-zimbabwe/.*

[32] Ibid., emphasis added.

WELCOMED TO *WHAT*? INCLUSION, ORTHODOXY, AND THE CANADIAN MAINLINE

By Ben Crosby

One of the first things that a visitor sees on the website of many mainline churches across Canada and the United States is a statement proclaiming that all sorts of people—and especially those who have been historically excluded from the church—are enthusiastically welcomed. Often sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, race, and class are specifically mentioned as posing no barrier to full inclusion in the community. This is true of both individual congregations and denominations. The Episcopal Church in the United States, the church in which I was ordained, discusses its "legacy of inclusion" on the "What We Believe" page of its website.[1] The United Church of Canada is particularly keen on this topic; it has a section entitled "Relationship and Inclusion" prominently placed on its website, organized around a quotation from "A Song of Faith": "Jesus . . . crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender. He preached and practised unconditional love."[2] The United Church, the website goes on, seeks to do likewise; it "prides itself on being open and welcoming as Jesus was, regardless of age, race, class, gender, orientation, or physical ability."[3]

This extravagant welcome is very dear to me. As a young adult I joined and eventually was ordained in the Episcopal Church in the United States in part because I longed to belong to a church community in which men and women alike could serve as clergy, same-gender and opposite-gender couples could both be married in the church, and the church repented of its participation in excluding others on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, and other marks of difference. My life of faith has been profoundly enriched by the witness to Jesus of those whom many Christian churches, even today, would deem incapable of being faithful witnesses: gay couples, women clergy, and transgender people. I believe that our commitment to welcoming others of all sorts is a charism of the mainline, both in Canada where I currently reside and in the United States where I grew up.

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[1] "What We Believe," The Episcopal Church, accessed May 13, 2023. *https://www.episcopalchurch.org/what-we-believe/.*

[2] "What We Believe: Relationship and Inclusion," The United Church of Canada, accessed May 13, 2023. *https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/what-we-believe/relationship-and-inclusion.*

[3] Ibid.

And yet, over the last few years, I have found myself increasingly concerned that our practice of welcome has gone significantly awry. While our churches rightly place radical, boundary-crossing hospitality at the center of how Christians are to relate to others, I worry that we often lose sight of the purpose of that hospitality. Bluntly put, when we welcome people to our churches, what are we welcoming people to? Often, I find, welcome becomes its own end; inclusion is aimed at nothing beyond the creation of diverse church communities. Yet if one is looking for a diverse community to which to belong or a community dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion in our broader society, one can find that outside the church, often more easily than inside it. If the goal of the church or the goal of the Christian faith is nothing other than welcoming diversity, there is scant reason to belong to a church or be a Christian at all. We miss, I am convinced, the true reason that an extravagant welcome into the church matters: because the church is not just any other social organization, but rather the means through which we live a life of discipleship following Jesus, a life of participation in the Triune God.

In this essay, I want to explore how welcome goes wrong and how it could be put right. I will begin in conversation with Willie Jennings and the book of Acts with a discussion of what our commitment to welcome gets correct: the centrality to Christianity of the coming together of strange, surprising communities by the Spirit's power. I will turn then to the question of how welcome goes awry, drawing upon the concept of characteristic damage articulated by Lauren Winner to explore the distortion of welcome in which inclusion becomes its own end and the church loses its ability to guide its members in following Jesus. Finally, I will argue that the centrality of welcome can be honoured, and its distortion avoided by what I call inclusive orthodoxy: a commitment to radical welcome precisely because our Lord Jesus Christ wishes to draw all people to a living faith in him and a life of discipleship following him.

Radical Joining: The Gospel Demands Extravagant Welcome

It is worth saying first of all that our current practices of welcome get something very important right: our faith demands an extravagant welcome which knits together strangers and even enemies into relationship with each other. We see this throughout Scripture, but perhaps most clearly in the Book of Acts. After all, at its core, Acts is about how God brings together Jew and Gentile in Christ, showing us a God who longs to join different peoples together in community through Jesus. As Willie Jennings puts it in his commentary on the book, the story of Acts is "a journey in

love through the Spirit who has revealed a God creating an intimate space of joining between Jew and Gentile."[4]

This shocking transformation is made particularly clear in the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. Peter is asked to go see the Gentile Cornelius, a Roman centurion, following a vision in which he is told not to call unclean what God has made clean. In obedience to the Spirit's prompting, and despite the proscriptions of association with Gentiles, Peter goes to see Cornelius, receives his hospitality, and tells him and those with him about Jesus. Then that very same Holy Spirit which fell upon the believers at Pentecost falls upon these Gentiles, Cornelius and his relatives are baptized, and the fellowship between Jew and Gentile which the Spirit inaugurated begins to be made concrete in daily life: Peter stays with Cornelius for several days. As Jennings notes, the brief description of Peter's stay with them (Acts 10:48b) is vital. In it, we see the joining that God desires made real, even if just for a few days: "This is what God wants, Jews with Gentiles, Gentiles wanting to be with Jews, and together they eat and live in peace."[5] In this moment, what Peter sees, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, is God welcoming the Gentiles—the non-chosen people, the religious other—and welcoming them not as Gentiles had been welcomed to the Jewish fold in the past, by becoming Jews, but precisely *as Gentiles*. This is why Peter at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 rejects the demand that Gentile believers in Christ be circumcised and observe the law of Moses (Acts 15:8-9). Standing on the other side of this change, we might miss just how dramatic it is: God bringing together Jews as Jews, Gentiles as Gentiles, in a new sort of community following Jesus.

If God has reconciled differences, beginning with the most basic religious distinction between Jew and Gentile, how can we do otherwise? We are, after all, commanded by no less than our Lord Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), and we are promised in the Revelation to John that "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" will stand "before the throne and before the Lamb," praising God for eternity (Revelation 7:9). As the church, we are to welcome as Jesus welcomes—welcome as the Spirit welcomes—inviting *all people* to salvation through Christ. The way that God seems to work, as Peter's encounter with Cornelius makes clear, is making those formerly suspicious of each other, those who were even enemies, into friends and siblings in Christ. As Jennings puts it, "the Spirit offers us God's own fantasy of desire for

[4] Willie Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 22.
[5] Jennings, *Acts*, 92-93.

people, of joining and life together and of shared stories bound to a new destiny in God."[6] When we welcome, especially those we would just as soon not welcome, we are yielding to the Spirit, to use Jennings' terminology—the Spirit that joins peoples in new life found in God.

A brief caveat is necessary here: to say that we are called by Christ to yield to the Spirit, in being joined to those who we would not expect to find ourselves alongside, does not itself answer contemporary questions about the place of women and LGBTQ people in the church. After all, the call to joining, to radical welcome, is coupled in Scripture with a call to holiness— "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48)—so there is no avoiding the exegetical and theological issues at hand with a vague appeal to the value of inclusion. I do believe that there are strong exegetical and theological grounds to support the ordination of women and the inclusion of LGBTQ people in the church, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.[7] What I want to establish here is simply that a commitment to radical welcome, especially of those historically not welcomed, is a faithful response to the Spirit's action in making friends out of enemies and joining peoples, a faithful living out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Radical Welcome's Characteristic Damage

Yet it is my conviction that this faithful response of welcoming across difference has gone seriously awry in our churches. It is not only that we fail to fully live up to our statements of inclusion and welcome (although God knows we do!). Rather, I worry that we have come to treat welcome as an end in itself rather than as aimed at welcoming people into life in Christ. Indeed, precisely in the name of inclusion, the very reason why including people *matters* comes to be downplayed or ignored altogether.

Here, I think a category developed by the Episcopal priest and academic Lauren Winner might be helpful. In her *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, Winner deploys the term "characteristic damage" to explore certain ways that Christian practices tend to go awry. Winner suggests that, as a result of the Fall, practices, themselves good, become

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[6] Jennings, *Acts*, 23.

[7] The literature here is, of course, vast. But texts that have been helpful to me include Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way Into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Gender, Sexuality, and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) and also *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

distorted or deformed in ways related to what the practices themselves are: "things become deformed by sin in ways that are proper to the thing being deformed."[8] Winner uses the example of a meal: we might say that a meal is aimed at "commensality," "defin[ing] and bind[ing] communities"—and thus can be characteristically deformed by "excluding from the table . . . the people who cooked the food."[9] My proposal, then, is that a sort of metastasizing of welcome from means to end, from a central part of Christian discipleship to the entire content of the Christian faith, is precisely the characteristic damage of the good and godly Christian community welcoming others in the way the Book of Acts models: it is welcome gone awry in a way related to welcome's genuine good.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this distortion of welcome is the attempt to welcome people as full members—even leaders! —in Christian churches who explicitly do not hold the Christian faith. I know of a church which I will not name that has as its motto "Believing is not a condition of belonging or beloving [sic] here." Now, I doubt not at all that behind this motto is, at core, a laudable and deeply Christian commitment to welcoming others in all their diversity into Jesus-centered community. What's more, it is certainly true that there is a place in our congregations for people who are not sure what they think about Jesus or who are plagued by doubt, yet nonetheless find themselves drawn to church (I expect that many of us have been this person at one time or another). And yet, what this statement ends up saying is that Christian belief is incidental to belonging to that church. That is, it declares that what the Christian church is about is not, in the final estimation, welcoming people into the Body of Christ and nurturing them as disciples of the risen Lord, discipleship which certainly involves beliefs about God, Christ, and the world even if it is not reducible to holding these beliefs. Often, in our churches, the aim of our welcome ends up being something like creating diverse community for its own sake, being—to use the phrase that white mainliners love to purloin from Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beloved Community" and working to instantiate that Beloved Community in our broader society. Welcome and inclusion become not just a means for the church to fulfill its mission, but the very mission itself.

It is generally a good thing, all else being equal, for organizations and communities to welcome others, to make space for diversity, to strive

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[8] Lauren Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 16.

[9] Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, 15.

to overcome patterns of dislike, discrimination, and prejudice. No question! But if this is all the church has to offer, what is the point of being a Christian? One can find a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives at the brunch table or in a book club; one can strive for a society that reflects ideals of justice and equity by joining a political organization. Even if our churches lived more fully up to our statements of welcome, this would still be true. And so, for our welcome to be worthwhile, it has to be welcome into something more than just another crumbling civic organization aimed at community and togetherness! Lovely as our communities are, we are missing the point and failing our people if we see no more important reason for inclusion. No, as the church, our welcome must be into nothing less than into death and resurrection, into life with God now and beyond the grave. Welcome's characteristic damage subordinates everything about the church—even the proper end of that welcome—to welcome itself. In so doing, it misses the very good news that makes our welcome worthwhile: the good news we have to share about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, good news that leads to the invitation to put our faith in him and live a life of obedience following him.

Ironically, the metastasis of welcome by which inclusion becomes its own end ultimately does a disservice to precisely those marginalized people we say we most want to include. It is my firm conviction that LGBTQ people and women ought to be fully welcomed into the church not because we think that Christian teaching about God or sin or holiness is irrelevant and all that matters is inclusivity, but because we believe that the living and true God who raised Jesus from the dead actually blesses women ministers and same-gender marriages. To be included because the God of the universe demands it is one thing. To be included because belief in God is not an important part of church membership and theology is outdated and so churches should follow progressive liberal-democratic norms is quite another. It is telling—and not, I'm afraid, in a good way—that the same-gender marriage rite that my own Episcopal Church passed removed the statement that marriage was instituted by God from the opening address. The old marriage liturgy, still usable by opposite-gender couples, proclaims that "the bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation." That the new rite does not raises a question: do we believe that same-gender marriages as marriages are in fact God-ordained? Or do we believe that marriage in general is simply a contingent social arrangement that we are free to adapt and change at will? When we welcome same-gender couples to marriage, is it really Christian marriage given to us by God to which they are welcomed, or an exercise in meaning-making in the face of a meaningless cosmos? If it is the latter,

why would anyone care very much about it? In short, my worry is this: precisely in the name of a deformed account of welcome, we end up particularly failing those who we most desire to welcome. We fail them because they come to us—often having been forced out of other places—to find Jesus, and instead we give them the pottage of inclusion-for-its-own-sake.

Welcome to Life in Christ: The Promise of Inclusive Orthodoxy

So how can we maintain the proper centrality of welcome in the Christian life while avoiding its characteristic damage of treating welcome as its own sole end? It seems to me that we need to be crystal clear about what we welcome *for*, about what precisely the end of our commitment to inclusion is: life in Christ. That is, our welcome has to be normed and driven by Christ, not only in the sense of imitating his own acts of boundary-crossing but also in that our welcome is aimed at bringing people to Jesus. One thinks about Paul here: he was "all things to all people," crossing boundaries by preaching to Gentiles that they could come to God *as Gentiles* (and dying for it!), but not in the name simply of creating diverse communities or friend-groups across the ancient Mediterranean (1 Cor 9:22). Rather, he did all this "for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor 9:23), the mind-bending truth that in Jesus God lived, died, and rose for us so that those who believe in him might receive forgiveness of their sins, be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and be saved for life forever with God.

The problem is not that we welcome broadly. No, the problem is that we are not always clear on what we are welcoming people into: being joined with Christ in his death and resurrection, being made a member of Christ's Body, participating in the very life of the Triune God! This is why we must cast aside any unnecessary hindrance to people coming to Christ; this is why we must follow the Spirit and allow ourselves to be joined to strangers and even enemies: not only because inclusion, in general, is good, but because we have been entrusted with something unbelievably precious. How could we not long to share it as indiscriminately as we can? I began with the story of Acts, and especially of Peter and Cornelius, as a model for Christian welcome: but the point of Peter's going to see Cornelius was not simply togetherness for its own sake, but a joining of Jew and Gentile that was first the opportunity for and then, when Peter lingered for a few days, the consequence of the proclamation of the Gospel.

Particularly in online conversations among younger mainliners, there is a name for this posture that I've sketched out above, a commitment to radical welcome precisely because it is welcome into *life in Christ*:

inclusive orthodoxy. It is summarized well by the online magazine *Earth & Altar*, which describes itself as "a blog/magazine for and by catholic and reformed Christians of all denominations who see an expansively conceived credal orthodoxy as fully compatible with LGBTQ inclusion, gender equality, and racial justice."[10] That is, the magazine takes as its basis the belief that one need not throw out the Nicene Creed, the authority of Scripture, traditional Christian beliefs about who God is, who Jesus is, what Jesus' death accomplishes, and so on to affirm the importance of concerns around inclusion such as LGBTQ inclusion, gender equality, and racial justice. I might put it even more strongly: for the person committed to inclusive orthodoxy, "inclusion" matters so much in the church precisely because inclusion in the church is (as the orthodox faith teaches us) inclusion into a life-transforming, saving relationship with Jesus!

I am a young minister in the Anglican church, with (God willing) forty years of ministry ahead of me. I do not know what the future of the mainline will be, either in Canada or in my own United States, although I see the same grim prognostications that everyone else does. But I do believe this: it will only matter if the mainline survives if we embrace this posture of "inclusive orthodoxy," re-orientating our commitment to welcome towards Jesus and so avoiding the characteristic damage of welcome-for-its-own-sake. If we continue to empty out the Gospel of its meaning for the sake of a mistaken account of inclusion, our churches' disappearance may well be for the best. But it is my hope and trust that if indeed we place joining people to Jesus at the center of our efforts at welcome, the same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will use us as instruments to nourish the Body of Christ in all its wondrous diversity. Then truly we will follow the Spirit in being joined to others across difference for the sake of being built up into Christ Jesus.

[10] "About," *Earth & Altar*, accessed May 13, 2023. *https://earthandaltarmag.com/about*.

PROPHECY BEYOND DOMINANT MYTHS

By Lucila Crena

"What even *is* prophetic?" A colleague asked the question in a text message, and it signaled a bit of a victory. He was attending a national gathering of progressive activists and policy wonks on the topic of "prophetic leadership." The two of us had been arguing for some weeks on whether the Prophecy Emperor had any clothes. I doubted it and he insisted on it, both of us pointing to the long and varied traditions around the term. "Can so many powerful traditions be nurtured out of an empty concept?", he'd ask. "But the term crumbles, it falls apart, the moment you try to grasp it," I'd reply. "Can it hold? What does it hold?"

He was right, of course. Only academic obstinacy would deny the vital power of the term "prophetic" out of concern for conceptual clarity—and not even academics seem interested in that effort. Instead, we produce book after book describing, reflecting, and striving to norm "the prophetic," hoping that our weighty accounts will be buoyed to popularity by the term. We do not root in or construct our accounts in the prophetic; we sail on it. And, like ships in the dark, our accounts pass each other, greeting one another desultorily but steering by the particular wind and currents in our particular patch of sea. George Shulman's *American Prophecy*, thus, has little to offer Cathleen Kaveny's *Prophecy without Contempt.* And both of them seem to exist in a world apart from Stephen Bevan's *Prophetic Dialogue*. There is surely an apparent resemblance between Michael Walzer's prophets-as-committed-critics and the prophets of Walter Brueggemann's imagination. But these accounts operate within contrasting visions of the way the prophetic relates divine and human agency—precisely that which ought to yield contrasting images of the human bearer of divine words. And while Sacvan Bercovitch's prophets in *American Jeremiad* are continually shoring up a middle-class consensus, Martin Buber's prophets—theopolitical anarchists—are continually placing humans before God's kingly presence.[1] This litany is still too restrictive, not yet including Christian cessationist accounts (which would restrict prophecy to the predictions they find in the Scriptures), nor those in the United States who write to "activate" prophets and seers, or who

[1] My contention is not that dialogue between these accounts is impossible, but that they appear to be in different conversations (even when they allude to one another).

share their visions to guide the Christian voter. Indeed: What even *is* prophetic?[2]

It is this combination of vagueness and power that suggests to me that "the prophetic" functions in a particularly ideological way in contemporary politics, and ought to be approached with care. I pursue that hypothesis more thoroughly in a larger research project. This brief essay focuses merely on what might be—for liberationists and progressive Christians—the least problematic definition of the prophetic: the offering of a faith-based critique of injustice in the public square. I wrestle here with the observation that has been made (appreciatively) by sociologists and (anxiously) by literary and critical scholars that, while the rhetorical tool of "prophetic critique" seeks to interrupt earthly powers in the name of the transcendent, it can actually contribute to the dominant myths by which earthly power sacralizes itself. I do not think that Christian liberationist and progressive theological accounts have sufficiently reckoned with this insight. This essay is an invitation to that more explicit reckoning, with the aim of enabling a prophetic witness that is less susceptible to cooptation.

To that end, I first explore the relationship between prophetic and kingly figures with S. N. Eisenstadt and Clifford Geertz. They argue that while prophets critique kings, they do so *on the basis* of that society's legitimatizing myths, and so in fact contribute to the extension of that society's dominant imagination of power. I then interpret this observation normatively, suggesting that liberationists and other theologians ought to be less sanguine than proponents of civil religion about the usefulness of this version of propheticism. Finally, I sketch a proposal for a reconceptualization of the prophetic that centers around encounter rather than norms-based critique. My aim is not to take "the prophetic" out of

[2] While biblical scholars also differ in their characterization of the prophetic, they explicitly contend with the way ideology and ethnocentrism might shape their reflections. See, for example, Brad E. Kelle's "The Phenomenon of Israelite Prophecy in Contemporary Scholarship." *Currents in Biblical Research* 12, no. 3 (June 2014): 275–320; Martti Nissinen's "Prophecy as Construct, Ancient and Modern," in *"Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela:" Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, edited by Robert P. Gordon and Hans Barstad (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), and David L. Petersen, ed. *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity* (Philadelphia and London: Fortress Press and SPCK, 1987). My concern is not with the multiplicity of views, but with an apparent disinterest in interrogating that multiplicity.

circulation but to relate it more closely to the encounter with strangers—who often bear the living God.

Kings, prophets, and the myths they share

The paradigmatic image of the prophet in progressive circles is that of the critic—someone who denounces injustice, usually in the name of God or transcendent norms, and especially before political and religious authorities who rule by oppression and exclusion.[3] Prophets may be ecstatics, artists, preachers, holy fools, activists, saints, or many other kinds of (usually public) figures. What they have in common is a rare proximity to the divine, which grants them a kind of transhistorical insight that enables them both to see through the violent self-deceptions and injustices of dominant society and to invite others to turn away from corrupting "enculturations."[4]

Different scholars have specified this model in myriad ways, with important distinctions among them. My aim through this sketch is to emphasize a common thread: That the prophet is an oppositional figure who transcends and unmasks a society's self-serving myths.[5] It is this claim that I contest. Instead, I argue that prophetic critics tends to use dominant myths in their critique, and thus to participate in the sacralization of those myths. I will show this point theoretically through Edward Shils' concept of center and periphery, and then concretize it through Clifford Geertz's application of these concepts to rites of royal progress.

In the mid-1960s, the sociologist Edward Shils revisited Weber's notion of charisma out of a concern that Weber had overdrawn the difference between a society's routine functioning ("the recurrent processes through which institutions reproduce themselves") and its disruptive, explosively novel elements.[6] In his tripartite model of

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[3] The prophet's role as critic may be only part of what the prophet does, or the prophet might be defined as one who offers a particular *kind* of critique (e.g., a public indictment, or a fiery sermon). The point here is that the prophet is one who *at least* offers a critique of injustice.

[4] To use Walter Brueggemann's term in *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

[5] As I discuss below, sociologists of religion and other scholars of civil religion would disagree with the characterization of the prophet as uniquely free from local imaginations of power. Nevertheless, their accounts rely on these kinds of prophetic oppositional performances that obscure the prophet's reliance on society's central myths.

[6] Edward Shils, "Charisma, Order, and Status," *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 2 (April 1965): 200.

legitimate authority, Weber had distinguished between bureaucratic-legal (rational), traditional, and charismatic authority. The first two types emanate from institutions; the latter belongs to extraordinary individuals who appear unusually proximate to the transcendent. This proximity affords the charismatic person an authority above the claims of both rules and precedents.[7] It enables her to judge the validity of routine norms, and to point to a better way.

The personal locus of this authority led Weber to believe (in Shils' words) that charisma was "intrinsically alien" to the other types of legitimate authority. Instead, Shils argued that charisma inheres in both institutions and persons, and flows from the same source: namely, their proximity to "some *very central* feature" of existence or the cosmos.[8] In more or less mediated forms, both institutions and extraordinary individuals appeal to the ordering, sacred center from which a society derives its norms. Or, to use the case of the Hebrew Bible, kings, priests, and prophets can all claim to mediate the divine, and ultimately appeal to the same Lord for their authority. It is this shared center of values, and the kings' and priests' failures relative to that center of values, that fuels the prophets' critiques.

Shils describes this center as "the center of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society."[9] Situated behind and beyond any articulation, the center is that which appears to be given, natural, or necessary, and from which meaning and order flow. As an ordering principle, it "partakes of the nature of the sacred."[10] Emanating from elites (religious, political, economic, etc.), it projects the legitimacy of the status quo.

Elites, however, tend to present themselves as agents of this sacred order, not its creators. The values that flow from the center are principles or ideals that might legitimize elites' normal ways of proceeding, but they are not simply equivalent with their whims. It is the gap between elites' actions and the ideals that they espouse that generates space for prophetic critics.[11] The prophet's conviction that the institutions have ceased to

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[7] For a similar interpretation of charisma, see S. N. Eisenstadt, "Introduction," in *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), xix and following.

[8] Shils, "Charisma, Order, and Status," 201.

[9] Edward Shils, "Centers and Periphery," in *The Logic of Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 117.

[10] Shils, "Centers and Periphery," 117.

[11] Shils, "Centers and Periphery," 120.

mediate central values truthfully is what generates the critique, and, at times, the prophets' call for reform (in either future-oriented or traditional ways, to recover a lost purity). The same central ideals, however, lie behind both the disruptive critic *and* the ordering elite.

In his "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," Clifford Geertz helpfully concretized Shils' account. Geertz describes royal progress rites in three societies with starkly different central value systems: Elizabeth I's England, Hayam Wuruk's Java, and Hasan's Morocco.[12] The rite by which the royal takes possession of the realm, said Geertz, "locate[s] the society's center [around the royal] and affirm[s] its connection with transcendent things."[13] The rites vary significantly, therefore, depending on how a society conceives of the sacred.

The imagination of Elizabeth's England was moral and didactic, and so the "the cult of the imperial virgin" involved royal progresses (or processions) replete with morality plays and pictorial symbols that imaged her as pilgrim or, at times, Virtue herself.[14] Her charisma, says Geertz, grew from "her willingness to stand proxy, not for God, but for the virtues he ordained."[15] By contrast, the political imagination of Hayam Wuruk's Java was "hierarchical and mystical," with the king "liminally suspended between gods and men" and ordering the cosmos around himself as center.[16] His royal progress involved a vast caravan of hundreds of animals and people, with the four ranking princesses (representing the four cardinal points) with him at the center. As he moved, the king ordered the world around himself, inviting the countryside to gather about him as they observed his passage—and, thus, to enact the structure of a cosmos in which order flows from a splendid center to every part of the realm. Finally, Geertz describes the constant campaigns of Mulay Hasan of Morocco as his royal progress. Geertz argues that an emphasis on the divine will, God's omnipotence and omnipresence, yielded an understanding of rule as the ability to impose one's will, and to appear to be everywhere at once. Hasan's progress was, therefore, neither moralistic nor splendidly hierarchical: he legitimized his rule by his apparent

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[12] Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 13–33.

[13] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 16.

[14] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 19–20.

[15] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 19.

[16] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 20.

presence in all parts of his kingdom, enabled by his courts' brief encampments and continual travel.[17] Across these societies, then, different imaginations of the sacred yielded different understandings of the way in which royals' rule, and thus different symbolic rites that communicate and legitimize that rule.

Geertz' essay is undoubtedly reductive and has more than a whiff of essentialism.[18] Societies have many elites and centers (economic, artistic, scientific, etc.), each with its own myths.[19] Societies are also riven by dominant and non-dominant groups, each again with its own centers, elites, and myths. These elites and the myths that they project relate to others in multiple ways, both affirmative and contestatory.[20]

The crucial insight for this essay, however, is that power asserts itself by its claim of participation in the sacred, variously conceived. It is this claim of participation in the sacred that makes elites vulnerable to critique by those claiming proximity to the sacred.[21] But the kind of critique to which the center is vulnerable depends on the particular conception of the sacred within which it is lodged. This is why, Geertz says, "no matter how peripheral, ephemeral, or free-floating the charismatic figure with whom we may be concerned—the wildest prophet, the most deviant revolutionary—we must begin with the center and with the symbols and conceptions that prevail there if we are to understand him and what he means."[22] Charisma yields legitimacy for rulers, as well as for their critics. It thus constrains the critics to those ruling myths.

This is one way to read Cornel West's observation that "The political predicament of all prophetic practices in the United States has been, and remains, the choice between ideological purity and political irrelevance, and ideological compromise and political marginality."[23] The

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[17] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 25–26.

[18] As an example of the richness possible in accounts that go beyond Geertz' formalism, the reader might enjoy "Ethics, Etiquette, and the Exemplary Center," in *Structure and Style in Javanese*, by J. Joseph Errington (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 22–45. My thanks to Sonam Kachru for the reference.

[19] Shils describes this type of complexity in Shils, "Centers and Periphery."

[20] For an exploration of this dynamic, see Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), especially chapter 2.

[21] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 30.

[22] Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 30.

[23] Cornel West, "The Prophetic Tradition in Afro-America," in *Let Justice Roll: Prophetic Challenges in Religion, Politics, and Society*, ed. Neal Riemer

prophet will be marginal; he can only save himself from irrelevance by accepting the co-opting myths of central elites. It may also explain Michel Foucault's resistance to being called prophetic, and his insistence that intellectuals ought to refuse to be the ones who tell people "the deep truth about themselves and the cosmos."[24] Through his genealogical method, Foucault sought to reveal the contingency of that which appears necessary; he sees prophets, instead, as those who say, "this is what must be done," participating in the perpetuation of (in Shils' words) central myths.[25]

Prophecy within the limits of central myths

What does this relationship between prophets and central myths mean for would-be contemporary prophets? For some scholars, the connection makes prophetic rhetoric an especially attractive political tool. The connection means that prophets invite a community to moral self-transcendence by holding it accountable to its own deepest-held beliefs. In so doing, the prophets unify and strengthen the political community by recalling it to itself, without advocating for a triumphalist ethnocentrism or nationalism.

There are towering figures whose accounts I would place within these general lines, including Robert Bellah,[26] James Darsey,[27] Phillip Gorski,[28] Cathleen Kaveny,[29] and Michael Walzer.[30] Despite their enduring

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 91.

[24] Cited in Christina Hendricks, "Prophecy and Parrēsia: Foucauldian Critique and the Political Role of Intellectuals," in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 212–30. My thanks to Chuck Mathewes for sharing this important essay, and to Brandy Daniels for our discussions of it.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotexte, 1996), 262. For other illuminating exchanges, see pp. 225, 284, 380, and 424-25.

[26] For example, in Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967).

[27] James Francis Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

[28] For example, in Philip S. Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[29] Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[30] For example, in Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*

importance, I am concerned on both theological and political grounds with a thread that I see connecting their accounts. Theologically, the use of prophecy as a political tool to secure the unity of the polity strikes me as an instrumentalization of the divine. And, while I agree that cultures can offer a witness to God, the assumption that a society's central myths straightforwardly participate in the divine order strikes me as overly hasty. The unwavering conviction of exceptionalism that courses through the prophetic tradition of the American jeremiad is a case in point.

Politically, the use of a society's central myths to make elites morally accountable seems to doom the project from the start. It involves accepting the self-projection of elites as the pre-condition for conceiving and advancing towards justice. Kirt H. Wilson's "Political Paradoxes and the Black Jeremiad" powerfully shows this dynamic at work. Wilson argues that Frederick Douglass' use of American exceptionalism in his prophetic denunciations against slavery had a paradoxical effect on the Black community. For while he succeeded in making room for African Americans within the nation's mythology, Douglass did so by "subsum[ing] the particular interests and needs of the Black population underneath the transcendent, atemporal purposes for the country's divine mission."[31] Marcia Y. Riggs' *Awake, Arise, & Act* vividly describes the dangers of such an inclusion, premised on the "American Dream" of individual economic advancement at the expense of the bonds of communal solidarity.[32] A prophetic critique that assumes the greatness of the American Way (either explicitly labeled, or, more frequently, disguised as a universal ideal) cannot learn from those on whose backs the project was built. The exposure of the fatal flaw at the very conception of the ideal appears to end all hope for the polity whose identity it defines. Prophets of an ideal, historically birthed but disguised in transcendence, will either buttress the ideal or despair. But prophets of a living, encountering God have other options.

Prophecy beyond critique

What are those options? While this essay has been a prologue to a constructive proposal that I can only sketch here, let me say briefly that my

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[31] Kirt H. Wilson, "Political Paradoxes and the Black Jeremiad: Frederick Douglass's immanent theory of rhetorical protest," *Howard Journal of Communications* 29, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 254.

[32] Marcia Riggs, *Awake, Arise, & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994).

proposal is that liberationists and other progressive Christian theologians should prioritize the image of prophets as intermediaries, rather than as critics. This image of prophecy as intermediation is the consensus view in biblical studies.[33] More significantly, however, I propose that the image of intermediation is more theologically apt and less ethically problematic than that of the critic.[34]

The main suspicion that this proposal needs to overcome is ethical: that prophecy-as-intermediation constitutes an evasion of moral reasoning. "Thus, saith the Lord" can be used to justify a course of action that is unanswerable to evidence, logic, or others. While I cannot fully dispel that danger, I propose that understanding prophecy as intermediation can actually *encourage* moral accountability more than can prophecy-as-critique. While the latter relies on disguising local ideals in the garb of divinity[35] and then "prophetically" judging others from those heights,[36] the former can lean instead on encountering divine presence in non-ideal neighbors, strangers, and cultural forms—that never become identified with the divine even as they bear it.

The ethical frameworks that can grapple with prophecy-as-intermediation are encounter-centric and non-ideal. They articulate a kind

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[33] The agreement is such that, in the *Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, biblical scholar Martti Nissinen can simply say that prophecy is "intermediation of divine knowledge by non-technical means." As I read it, the main fault line in biblical studies is whether to understand biblical prophecy as a reliable window into the historical phenomenon of Israelite prophecy, or as a scribal creation. For the consensus position, see Martti Nissinen, "Prophetic Intermediation in the Ancient Near East," in *Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (Oxford University Press, 2016), 5–22. For another take on the consensus, as well as broader exploration of controversies, see Brad E. Kelle, "The Phenomenon of Israelite Prophecy in Contemporary Scholarship," *Currents in Biblical Research* 12, no. 3 (June 2014): 275–320. See especially pp. 291-300.

[34] To emphasize intermediation is not to take critique off the table, but to subordinate it to a prior encounter with the divine.

[35] I think here of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's characterization of an abstract, absolute ethical criterion as "a Moloch, to whom all life and freedom are sacrificed," in *Ethics*, trans. Clifford J. Green, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, v. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 247. My thanks to Creighton Coleman for this helpful connection, and the conversation on this essay more generally.

[36] In ways that are often dangerous to practical deliberation and other crucial democratic practices, as Cathleen Kaveny argues powerfully in *Prophecy without Contempt*, esp. 239–372.

of normativity that flows from and toward encounter in the midst of (what Christians might term) a fallen world. These accounts consequently provide a framework from which to rethink what it means, ethically and politically, to be encountered by the Divine Other and to communicate something of that encounter among neighbors and strangers. The kinds of frameworks that may be helpful appear in theological and non-theological texts, including Serene Khader's *Decolonializing Universalism,* Marcia Riggs' *Awake, Arise, and Act,* and Margaret Urban Walker's *Moral Understandings.* In a more explicitly political theological register, Luke Bretherton's *Christ and the Common Life* and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* emphasize an approach to the common life that prioritizes encounter (with strangers, but also potentially with the Divine through them) and measures norms by the way these norms enable or block such an encounter.

Theologically speaking, does this emphasis on encounter muddle terms too much? After all, God thunders from Sinai. The LORD cannot be expected to wait in line at our City Council meetings.

Christian (and other) theologies do seek to distinguish carefully between God and creatures. Discerning how to do that will be an important aspect of a recovering prophecy-as-intermediation. But I think a more basic rethinking of prophecy is in order. The awe and splendor of many biblical theophanies can suggest that prophecy entails the divinization of the prophet's words: When she speaks in the name of God, it is tempting to imagine the prophet's words as achieving a kind of transhistorical, universal authority. For the Jewish and Christian tradition, however, every divine act of communication is a condescension: It is God's condescension and consent to make God's word appear in time, in language, enculturated—and, in the process, to make it vulnerable to misunderstanding and rejection.

Prophecy-as-encounter does not necessarily mean prophecy-as-civil-dialogue. It might *include* critique, or even a silence that communicates the impossibility of dialogue. The point is that prophecy as divine word to humans entails that divine word becoming vulnerable. The rabbis say that "It is not in heaven." Christians say that "The Word became flesh." This is the glory and humiliation of prophecy: A sign of God's gracious desire to communicate with humans and entrammel God's purposes in human history,[37] it is also God's-Word-made-vulnerable.

[37] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 11.

Prophecy is not the overruling of human agency, but precisely God's invitation to it.

Conclusion

During a conference, I was arguing with a very incisive, very direct senior colleague about the dangers of prophetic denunciation generally, and of the American Jeremiad in particular. With evident exasperation at my naïvete, she finally said: "Look. We need the state to be able to kill. Only the sacred can kill. Therefore, we need the state to be sacred." Her logic haunts me still.

Those who aspire to take up the prophetic mantle in the style of critics are, maybe ironically, likely to contribute to that sacralization of dominant centers of power. Those of us who seek to limit the authority of the state or other rulers, to place them under divine review, might need to desacralize that authority by seeing it in more purely instrumental terms: not as the sacred center of a people, but as the means that a people use to encounter one another, and to encounter the God who encounters them in one another.

FROM THE HEART
By Emily Carr

I was ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada in 2012 and admitted into the United Church of Canada in 2021. At this time, I'm a hospital chaplain with the Northern Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy in Saskatoon, and a minister at Knox United Church in Langham, Saskatchewan, a rural community close to the city.

In my role as hospital chaplain, I am sometimes called upon to officiate at funerals for patients. This winter, I received a call from two sisters. They were sitting in their car and I was on speakerphone. They asked if I could help with the funeral for their third sister, I'll call her Staci. Staci was the youngest of three girls, and only forty years old; the same age as I am now. Staci had lived a difficult life. She lived on the streets for over fourteen years in Saskatoon and had been in the hospital for a couple of months before she died.

As I talked with her sisters about how they wanted to honor Staci, they said, "no religion. Absolutely no religion. We're not religious. We don't want any religion. Staci wasn't religious either." In moments like these, I wonder why people ask me, a minister of religion, for services with no religion.

As I continued to listen, they said things like, "we're not sad, at least we know where she is." And, "now we don't have to worry about her anymore, she's not in pain." This made me think of heaven. They chose The Rose, by Bette Midler, and My Heart Will Go On, by Celine Dion to be played at the service. Both of these songs are about the eternal nature of love. This made me think of God.

I heard a deep spirituality in what they were expressing about how they wanted to commemorate their sister's life. Even though she had struggled, they chose to believe and trust that she was now free from that struggle, that she was at peace, and that she was finally safe.

I carefully wrote a service without any religious words in it. When the time came for the funeral, we gave thanks for Staci's life. We honored all the best things about her, and we talked about the peace that could be felt knowing that she was no longer lost and afraid.

In Matthew 25, there is the story of the king welcoming the righteous into heaven- saying, "I was hungry and you gave me something

to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was sick and you looked after me..." And the righteous don't know what the king is talking about. They say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" And the king says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." This gospel is a reminder that when we go to those who are sick, or who need help, or to those who are suffering, or mourning, we don't go to bring God, but to encounter the living God in their presence.

God is already there.

In ministry, with a bookshelf full of theology, a brain full of ideas about God, and a computer full of sermon outlines, this is a teaching I forget all the time. For me, Matthew 25 means that God is so close to those who are sick and struggling, that when we meet them, it is like meeting Christ. Christ is so close to the "least of us", that being with them is being with God, listening to them is listening to God. In community with the "least of these" there is an opportunity for inspiration and transformation that can't be found on my computer desktop.

When I think about the "least of these" the least of our community, I think of a person like Staci—a woman who lived many years on the street—who suffered addiction and illness, who was so sick that she died young. In getting to know Staci and her sisters, I experienced an encounter with the living God, and here, I can try to put into words what I heard from God through them.

By saying "no religion" for the service, I believe they meant something like no judgement, no dogma, no condemnation. They were expressing that they didn't want me to do or say one single thing to make the experience harder, because Staci had had it hard enough already. In asking me, a minister, to officiate, I believe they were asking for compassion, asking me to listen, to come, to be a witness to their sorrow. I believe they were asking me to offer their sister the dignity and care that I would offer a child of God—because she is a child of God, she is loved, she is their little sister.

Through Staci and her sisters, God challenged me to be a better chaplain; a chaplain who could let go of the words and traditions I cling to for comfort and direction, and find words that were gentler, kinder, and broader. It was not just a call but a wake-up call. Through these three women, I was reminded where God stays, and what God requires of me. It was an invitation to follow rather than to lead, to seek out the presence of God in the people I was present with.

After Staci was buried, we were standing outside in the frozen graveyard. The middle sister walked over to me, and she was crying. She pulled a large crucifix necklace out of her winter coat and showed it to me. She said, "Staci is with Jesus. I just know it." For me, the image of the crucifix is a representation of God suffering, a symbol that God experiences misery and is in unity and solidarity with all who suffer, who are sick, who feel alone, all who are dying. If God is near to the broken-hearted, as we read in Psalm 34, then of course Staci was with Jesus and of course Staci is with Jesus now. Even at a funeral without the word Jesus, Jesus was there. Jesus would have been there had I decided to do the non-religious funeral or not. I'm grateful for having had the opportunity to be present and honored that I was trusted to bear witness to all that God was doing that day.

Most days, on this journey in ministry and as a Christian, I think about the words of the Scriptures, and I hold my theology teachers and all that they taught me in seminary close to my heart. But now I also pray that I can remember that I don't bring God to anyone, because God is already there. I feel grateful when I remember this. I feel relief in knowing that this responsibility is not mine, and I feel inspired to go out with an open heart, and open ears to see and to hear where I will meet God next.

ALFRED GANDIER
By Neil Young

Alfred Gandier, Presbyterian minister, champion of Church Union, Principal of Knox (1908-27), Emmanuel (1928-32)[1] and Union Theological Colleges (1927-28) and Moderator of the General Assembly (1923) was born November 29th, 1832. Alfred's grandfather, Joseph Gandier or Gander (the name has always been pronounced "Gand-yer", and this old spelling points that way) came to Upper Canada from Kent County, England, around 1840 under the Colonial Missionary Society of the Church of England, and worked in the settlement areas of Hastings and Peterborough counties.

Alfred's father, also Joseph, was undismayed by the hardships of his parents' missionary work and dreamed of entering the ministry of the Church of England. He married Helen Eastwood, a neighbour in Hastings County, and settled down on a backwoods farm for a time. But by the time he had three small sons, Joseph Gandier could no longer resist the urge to preach, and the family relocated to Wolfe Island, where Joseph attended Queen's University in nearby Kingston. He was ordained by the Presbyterian church in 1874 at Fort Coulonge, Quebec, to a ministry of timber roads and loggers' shanties. Alfred, the oldest son, would accompany his father on trips of 150 miles through forest trails. He must have been a great help to his father, as his grandmother wrote him a letter when he was only four years old, approving of his decision to give up butter in order to pay for new shoes, and reminding him to Live Jesus.[2]

When he was fourteen years old, Alfred was recruited by the trustees of the school section to tutor a group of boys about 6 miles from the village for $150. He later said, "it was a beginning, and I knew I never would get to High School unless I earned the money and made the venture."[3]

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[1] The Methodists left the choice of a new name for the union college to the Presbyterians, who chose 'Emmanuel' over the other contender, 'Westminster'.

[2] Much of the material in this profile is taken from John Dow, *Alfred Gandier, Man of Vision and Achievement*, (Toronto: UPCH 1951).

[3] Dow, p. 6.

After five years of teaching and studying, in June 1877, he wrote the teacher's certificate exams in Pembroke and scored first out of 110 candidates. "That settled it for me," he said, "Give me a chance and I can do what others do."[4] He had saved enough for a year in high school, so he entered Kingston Collegiate, where in one year he earned Matriculation, the Governor General's medal, and a scholarship to pay for his first year at Queen's University. He was twenty years old. While at Queen's University, he and a group of students organized Sunday evening Evangelistic meetings at Kingston City Hall that carried on for several winters. In summers, he was appointed by the Home Mission Committee to work as a catechist in the Presbytery of Saugeen—an area of poor land, swamps, and bad roads.

> The people received me very kindly. I found that they scarcely deserved the character which had been given them, hard-hearted sinners. Sinners they were and no doubt many of them grievous sinners. Like all people when left without regular means of grace, they had grown cold and careless; but they were not hard-hearted. They seemed rather to be open to any influence for good.[5]

The mission station at Black's Corners had been formed by members who had left the Presbyterian Church in Shelburne, greatly offended that an organ had been introduced there. A second place, called Howlitt's Settlement, was said to be a long distance away over road and footpath in the bush, but nobody knew where it was. It was said that a student named Smith had preached there in past summers. As soon as the roads were in a fit state, Alfred was advised he should hunt up the place, and work the two stations together in the best manner possible. This he did, applying his attitude of moral seriousness even more strictly to himself, as these diary entries from these summers testifies:

> Sunday May 8th—Spent the morning in devotional exercises and in studying my sermon. I fear that it was my sermon and not the Lord's, for its delivery was a comparative failure. There appeared no life-giving

[4] Dow, p.7.
[5] Dow, p.7.

> power and yet it presented the Gospel clearly . . . no doubt there was too much trust in self . . . [6]
>
> Thursday May 12th—The great trouble in visiting is to get people to talk about anything pertaining to their eternal welfare . . . talk about weather, crops, etc. . . How little spirituality in my life and conversation! Help me, O Lord, to remember . . . that every thought, word and action should tend to Thy glory. After returning home, studied Physics one hour. [7]
>
> Sabbath, July 24th—the schoolhouse at Black's Corners was again crammed to its utmost capacity . . . Such a large audience . . . had the very evil effect of lifting me up a little. That old serpent the Devil whispered in my ear, "You must be doing well, people are coming from all directions to hear you." God in mercy humbled me . . . The whole service seemed to be . . . all to no purpose . . . Surely this will teach me lessons. [8]

His summer ministry was so well-received that $300 was raised to build a church. Rev. John Campbell, Presbyterial Supervisor of the mission field, reported that at a meeting to name the new church, proposals of St. Andrew, St. Paul, Knox, Guthrie and Chalmers were all set aside and unanimous support was given for the name "Gandier Church".[9]

Even so, Gandier confessed to always heaving a sigh of relief when summer was over and he was on the train returning to college. He graduated in 1884 with Gold Medals in Philosophy and in History and English Literature. Entering the Divinity course at Queen's, he worked summers at St. Mark's Mission in Toronto. After graduation, he was assistant to Rev. D.J. Macdonnell at St. Andrew's in Toronto. In the fall

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[6] Dow, p.21. The originals of all these letters can be found in the "Alfred Gandier" fonds of the Archives at Victoria University.

[7] Dow, p.25.

[8] Dow, p.21.

[9] Gandier Presbyterian Church, Keldon 1881-1922, Gandier United Church, 1925-2008. Corbetton - Keldon Pastoral Charge (Ont.) fonds - United Church of Canada Archives (*unitedchurcharchives.ca*); Gandier United Church - Ontario Abandoned Places (*talkingwallsphoto.com*).

1888, he travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland for further study. In one year, he attained the 3-year B.D. degree.

On returning to Canada, he was ordained and began ministry at Brampton Presbyterian Church. Though a country town, Brampton, "had more business with the Court Book at York than any other outside township, and that largely took the form of actions for assault and battery, and applications for tavern licenses…"[10] In addition to attacking public evils from the pulpit, and appeals for purity and righteousness, he added nighttime forays to break-up fights in the streets. "His influence upon the Brampton congregation was remarkable and upon boys of my age incalculable," reported one of those boys who later became a professor.[11] But his most distinctive impact in each congregation was the elevation of the missionary cause. In one Sunday at Brampton, advocating to place a missionary in British Columbia, he raised $400—the amount usually given for the entire year from that church.

Meanwhile, in Halifax, "a prosperous city where all Protestant denominations were at work with fine churches well-attended, and where the Roman Catholic Church was very strong"[12] the much-loved minister of seventeen years of Fort Massey Presbyterian Church, Rev. R. F Burns, D.D., died. After a long vacancy, an outstanding candidate was found. But, on the Monday morning following the second of a three-Sunday trial in the pulpit, "this candidate was seen on a Barrington Street horse-car. . . smoking a long, black cigar with the evident enjoyment of an addict".[13] A wider search included inquiries to the theological colleges. Principal Rev. G. M. Grant, D.D, C.M.G., replied that Alfred Gandier was one of Queen's most brilliant graduates in Arts and Theology, and justifying in the pastorate the expectations of his professors.[14] Gandier was called to Halifax in Oct. 1893.

His preaching brought him immediate attention, and, in a time of religious unrest over the collision of science and the book of Genesis, his Sunday evening lectures, "Gandier on Genesis," drew large crowds, including the Protestant members of the Legislature, then in session. His pastoral work and hospital visitation were exemplary, and he was much in demand as a preacher and lecturer on special occasions throughout the Synod. As ever, Gandier was a tireless advocate of foreign missions, and

[10] Dow. p.45.
[11] Dow, p 47.
[12] Dow, p 47.
[13] Dow, p.54.
[14] Dow, p.54.

soon the Fort Massey Church led all the congregations in the Maritime Synod in its mission contributions, especially to Korean missions:

> He pictured Korea's spiritual poverty, contrasting it with Canada's spiritual plenty . . . [and made] . . . a very gently spoken appeal for loyalty to the Evangelical tradition of the Motherland. The vote was taken, the motion carried by an overwhelming majority . . . that was the way that Korea was adopted as a colony of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.[15]

Gandier was elected President of the Lord's Day Alliance. The Fort Massey Church opened a new building for its Sabbath School. The newly-adopted "duplex envelope" brought in unprecedented amounts for both local church and missions. Many retired ministers attended Fort Massey, including Dr. and Mrs. David Waters, in whose home their niece, Jean, of Middlesex County, Ont., also lived. She was a popular member of the congregation and the university circle. Alfred married Jean on June 1, 1899, in Newark, N.J., in the presence of "a few friends" including the moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland and the president of Dalhousie University.

In January 1900, Alfred Gandier was called to St. James Square United Presbyterian Church on Gerrard St. in Toronto.[16] The church was an acknowledged powerhouse, whose offshoot missions grew into the College Street Church and St. John's Church. Premier Sir Oliver Mowat, William Cavan, Principal of Knox College, and many other luminaries were among its congregation. Within a year, missionary giving had doubled. Soon he was teaching Apologetics at Knox College and a member of the Board.

In April 1908, both Montreal and Knox Colleges conferred upon him a Doctor of Divinity, and by the autumn he had been called to the Principal's Chair at Knox. Knox College had been on Spadina Ave. for forty years, and Gandier took up the project of moving the college onto the

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[15] Dow, p. 62, relating eyewitness accounts of a motion by Alfred Gandier at the Oct. 1897 meeting of the Maritime Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Moncton, N.B.

[16] Later St James-Bond United Church. Legend has it that Ian Fleming once stayed across the street on Avenue Rd. and took the name for the most famous character in spy fiction. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._James-Bond_Church.*

Toronto University campus. At his induction, November 19, 1908, before a great congregation in Convocation Hall, he said:

> (the) College . . . has trained more than 800 men for the Christian ministry, the greater number of whom . . . are in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Canada today . . . We have the greatest student centre in Canada, one of the greatest in the world . . . of the nearly 4,000 students now in attendance at the University and its federated Colleges, nearly one half are Presbyterians.[17]

Far from being a triumphal paean, this was an appeal for the funds required to build the new college. "We have no Massey Estate to give us $400,000 in a lump sum for new buildings, as has our fortunate sister College, Victoria."[18] Two solid subscriptions from overseas were offered, and a small number of subscriptions in the thousands of dollars. But the bulk of the funding to build Knox came from thousands of medium and small subscriptions from all parts of the province. Famously, Gandier was out across rural and urban Ontario, preaching, lecturing, and visiting farm homes and owners of small manufactories, for so many Sundays and days over the next years that he is credited with raising almost the whole sum by himself. This letter to Jean gives colour to his unremitting hard work:

> *April 13th, 1910*
> *My Dearest Jean,*
> *Another day ended and my subscriptions are beautifully less each day. Yesterday seemed woefully small and disappointing at $175 for the day, but I am making progress downward, for today only totalled $135.*[19]

He worked on and on, until the entire amount had been committed. The corner stone of the new Knox was laid on Thursday September 26, 1912, and the public opening of the building was on Wednesday September 29, 1915.

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[17] Dow, p.75.

[18] Dow, p. 87, from a report to the Board of Knox College.

[19] The "Jean Waters Gandier" fonds of the Archives of Victoria University, Toronto. These fonds have now been renamed as part of the "Alfred Gandier" fonds. Very many thanks to Jessica Todd, Records Manager/Archivist at Victoria, for help and guidance.

With the end of the war, Gandier founded the Church Forward movement, including the creation of a Peace Fund of five million dollars. He was the driving force behind the opening of the School of Missions in 1921, through the cooperative leadership and funding of the mission boards of several churches.

Gandier had declared himself early in favour of the "organic union" of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches and was at the centre of the movement. In his sermon for the New Year on Dec. 31, 1905, he said, "Organic union may not come for years, but . . . surely the thought of a great united Church, bound together in faith and love . . . will appeal to the imagination of all."[20]

In 1923, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly which would decide the question, and his earnest pleading for the cause continued. In 1925, Church Union was achieved. However, for Gandier, there was an unexpected disappointment. A decision of the Ontario Legislature in April, 1925, allotted the Knox College building, for which Gandier had campaigned so many years, to the non-concurring Presbyterians. The process carried over into 1927. At that time, Gandier and Dr. James Endicott were visiting the Korea Mission and civil war-torn China. It was in China that Gandier received the news that the name, charter and the endowment of Knox College had been given to the continuing Presbyterians. Jean (Waters) Gandier writes, "My husband felt smitten . . . When we reached our own room after dinner he said, 'This is pretty hard from men who are supposed to be my friends . . . It seems as if my life's work was considered of little value and counted for nothing.' I could have wept for him, but I knew that wouldn't do."[21] By breakfast he was smiling and seemed to have turned his face to the future.

When the Gandiers returned home on June 29th, there were more projects to be undertaken, as students and staff of Union Theological College had relocated to the grounds of Victoria College. Gandier, as Principal, took on the task of planning the new college, which was renamed

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[20] Preached at St. James' Square Church, Toronto, and published by the Board of Manager(?). This sermon long predates his "road trips" to fund the building of the new Knox College, and so nothing appears about what would later become a fraught question of colleges in the Union. Nor, in any of the letters from 1910-12, from his famous fundraising tours, does he ever comment on the question..

[21] Dow, p. 11. It does appear that Gandier hoped to the very end that it might all get sorted out.

Emmanuel. Three years later, the foundation stone was laid on April 22, 1930.

Gandier's time in ministry was coming to a close, for in July 1932, he reached the age limit for retirement. At the closing Divinity Convocation of Victoria University in 1932, he spoke assurance:

> think what it means to share with Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, in the personal care and cure of souls! . . .The task is superb, and the responsibility is appalling . . . nothing is more fatal than to go away from the College with the idea that you are a man of such scholarship and spiritual attainments as to be quite beyond the need of beginning humbly and rising slowly to influence through years of patient service.
>
> I can testify from a very blessed experience, in three congregations of different types, that if a minister is only half of what he ought to be as a pastor and preacher, people will love him and trust him and open up their lives to his influence beyond anything he might reasonably have expected.[22]

Rev. Dr. Alfred Gandier died Monday morning, June 13th, 1932, at the age of 71, one month before his official retirement. He had preached at Orangeville the week before, against the pleas of both Jean and his doctor. At the funeral service on June 15th, Dr. George C. Pidgeon and Dr. Richard Davidson, incoming Principal of Emmanuel College, took part in the funeral service at Bloor Street United Church. Former students bore him to Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

His portrait remains at Emmanuel College and in Burwash Hall, the dining hall of Victoria University. Rev. Dr. Alfred Gandier is to be well remembered for his great heart for pastoral ministry, his countless contributions to the mission field, and the shaping of two Canadian denominations, and two theological colleges.

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[22] Address by Dr, Gandier, April 19th, 1932 in *In Memoriam, Alfred Gandier, 1861-1932.*

Barth in Conversation. Volume 2, 1963.
Karl Barth. Edited by Eberhard Busch. Louisville: W Westminster John Knox Press, 2018. Pp. xx + 249.

My introduction to Karl Barth was reading *The Word of God and The Word of Man*. From that volume I tried to read Barth's later writings with little success. Barth always seemed to be an inaccessible mountain I did not even attempt to climb. If all you know of Barth is that he is a theologian whose work can be difficult, this book does provide a glimpse of different sides of the man.

This volume is a series of interviews and forums conducted by Karl Barth in 1963. They range from magazine and media interviews to gatherings of pastors or students. Each of the twenty-four chapters opens with a brief description of the context of that conversation with Barth. The chapters range in size from one to sixty-three pages. Four chapters (12, 16, 18 and 21) take up 70% of the book's pages.

The varying size of the chapters creates one of the first issues with the book. Some of the chapters are so short that they contain very little information, and one is almost incomprehensible because it is based on written notes (see chapter 3). The value of the longer chapters does make up for these inconsistencies.

Barth is ever the theologian attempting to explain his own work, but this volume shows Barth the teacher, wishing to draw his audience to the truth about the Christ. His main topics are the distinction between Scripture and the Word, and the battle between faith and rationality.

The book shows Barth, the public intellectual. He deals with topics which are current in his own day, but which give us insight into our own circumstances. What political party should Christians vote for? What does peace really mean in a nuclear age? What does the fear of war mean for the church's eschatology? Many of these topics remain a vital issue, albeit with some differences, allowing Barth's words to resonate with a 2023 audience.

The book shows Barth, the churchman. He discusses the distinction often made between the church and the world. He has encouraging words about the opening days of the Second Vatican Council. He takes on inter church struggles in Germany and France, always with a mind to what can keep the church's witness at the forefront.

The book shows Barth the pastor. He is ever concerned with how his audience lives out the Christian life. He worries about the misapplication of his theology to the pastoral concerns of ministers.

Barth's character comes alive in many portions of the book. He is remarkably funny and comes off as a warm and genial respondent to the questions he is asked. This is not Barth speaking from an academic ivory tower, but Barth as a Christian minister dealing with his various audiences from their own context.

Barth is, however, a creature of his time, and has the same blind spots as many other mainstream church leaders. He shows a remarkable naïvete regarding the situation of Christians in the Soviet bloc. His descriptions of American evangelicals can seem a bit shallow. These examples can show that we all need to check where our own biases lie.

What is the final verdict on this book? As someone who is unfamiliar with much of the history Barth is commenting on, I would have liked more extensive footnotes explaining names and situations. But that quibble, with the others mentioned above, do not make the book unreadable. Barth explaining his own theology, and how it impacts the church, the world and the individual Christian, is a valuable resource. I, though, am neither dismayed nor excited by my reading of this book. Barth's work remains an inaccessible mountain: this book is just a camp near the base.

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Water From Dragon's Well: The History of a Korean-Canadian Church Relationship.

David Kim-Cragg. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. Pp. xxxii + 298.

David Kim-Cragg is a lecturer at Emmanuel College and serves in paid accountable ministry at St. Matthew's United Church in Richmond Hill. In this well written book he describes and analyzes the history of the relationship between The United Church of Canada (UCC) and Korean Christians. Part I begins in Kando, a border region in northeast China, where a substantial number of Koreans lived in the late 1800s. A spirit of Korean nationalism prevailed here that became fused with Protestant Christianity. The first Canadian Protestant missionaries encountered this when they arrived in 1888. Kim-Cragg ably illuminates how colonial aspects of the Canadian Mission clashed with this Korean nationalism,

even while the former's educational and religious work often reinforced it. Following the formation of the UCC, Canadian missionaries began to move towards a more co-operative style of working with Korean Christians.

After World War II and Korea's liberation from Japanese rule, an independent Korean Protestant church was created that pushed back against missionary control over it. During the Korean war the UCC began to provide scholarships enabling a few Koreans to come to Canada for theological studies. The Korean Presbyterian Church split in two in 1953, and in 1955 the UCC became aligned with the "politically active and independently minded" Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).

In Part II, Kim-Cragg details how the PROK continued to chafe under colonial aspects of the Canadian mission while the latter tried to separate itself from its colonial legacy. In 1974 a consultation between PROK leaders and their UCC counterparts dramatically changed their relationship. At the PROK leaders' request, all UCC properties in Korea were transferred to the PROK, and henceforth, UCC overseas personal in Korea became directly accountable to PROK General Assembly staff. A large house that formerly housed UCC missionaries became the home of a theological seminary where Minjung theology, a liberation theology indigenous to Korea, was born. Kim-Cragg nicely summarizes the outlines of this theology, how it developed and its importance for the PROK and beyond. He also devotes a whole chapter to the role of Canadian women in the UCC's Korean work at this time, the relationships between the women, and the transformative effect of this relationship on the Canadian women.

Part III shifts attention to the presence of Koreans in The United Church of Canada, from 1965 on. By the mid 1970s large numbers of Koreans were emigrating to Canada. Many became involved with the UCC. By the 1980s there were eleven Korean congregations in the United Church. As Korean membership in the UCC grew, so did the number of Koreans serving in paid accountable ministry in largely Caucasian congregations. Focusing on the work and experiences of future Moderator Sang Chul Lee, who served Toronto Korean United Church, and Dong-Chun Seo and Kay Cho, who served as paid-accountable ministers for largely Caucasian UCC congregations in the 1980s and 90s, Kim-Cragg analyzes how the diaspora Korean community struggled to find its place within the UCC. He then turns to six Canadians who had significant and sometimes transformative experiences working with Korean Christians, either in Canada or Korea. The sixth, Michael Blair, current General

Secretary of the UCC, reflects on the role of Koreans in the UCC's Ethnic Ministry Council. Kim-Cragg's "Conclusion" insightfully analyzes the reciprocal nature of the relationship that has developed between Korean Christians and the UCC. Originally, missionaries were sent to evangelize and serve Koreans. In time, Korean Christians, through their influence on UCC personal and their presence in the UCC, have had a transformative influence on it, moving the UCC towards becoming an intercultural church and broadening the horizons of many of its members.

This is a fascinating account of a transformative relationship that had unintended beneficial consequences for the UCC. Since the 1960s, the UCC has greatly changed its mission goals and practices, both abroad and in Canada. This history provides part of the story of how and why this change happened. It also raises a question. There are now fewer Korean-speaking congregations in the UCC and fewer Koreans in leadership positions within the UCC General Council (229) than there were in 1996. Why is that, and what does it signify?

This book will be important for clergy, academics and educated lay people interested in the United Church, its past and future, and in the place of Koreans within it.

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In Search for a Theology Capable of Mourning: Conversations and Interpretations after the Shoah

H. Martin Rumscheidt, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2017. Pp. v + 250.

Martin Rumscheidt's life's work is shared at a timely hour. Amid a cultural period where society is striving to reach a new level of comfort with otherness, this collection of essays helps to demonstrate how much reflection and work is entailed in pursuing this goal, and how easily cultures and nations choose to be "away-lookers," as Rumscheidt describes. This book reflects Rumscheidt's life and career as a German theologian following the Holocaust or Shoah. He was born in 1935 in Germany, where his father worked with IG Farben, a company directly associated with operations at Nazi death camps in WW2. He emigrated to Canada, where his newfound friendship with Jews in Montreal strongly influenced and moulded his lifelong work of reflection and reconciliation.

Rumscheidt articulates grace's grief and mourning in this collection of essays which is divided into three parts: the first part focuses

on the influence of his mentors, the second part asks essential questions that arise from the Shoah, and finally, the third part discusses his vision of theology following the Shoah. While there is a fair bit of repetition throughout the essays, a few new details shape a fuller picture with each addition. It would be beneficial and prudent to have this collection distilled into a flowing work of his theology which embraces mourning. Rumscheidt doesn't just search for but articulates grace's grief and mourning, and the church and society would benefit from his teaching.

As a student of Karl Barth and mentored by the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothee Soelle and others, Rumscheidt was directly influenced by some of the most prominent theologians of this century. Referencing Bonhoeffer and Soelle, Rumscheidt explores the theology of God's welcome extended not only to the excluded but also to the excluders. The essays in the first portion of this book reflect on otherness and grace. Beyond the socio-political implications of the time, the culturalization of Christianity and the "religionization" of fascism, Rumscheidt brings forward the greater values of Christianity. Throughout the first part of this collection, there are references and tributes to liberation theology and the work toward reconciliation between Canada and the First Nations. Apart from Rumscheidt's lived experience, these essays offer a form of confession that is helpful to people from cultures and groups who have perpetrated injustices, whether directly or indirectly.

Rumscheidt references an interview with Beyers Naudé, who urges the church to clearly distinguish between neutrality and reconciliation (70). His thoughts and references are valuable resources for encouraging confession, helping to lead us to the joy of repentance, and guiding us through mourning, into a new form of relationship beyond solidarity. More support for this is found in Bonhoeffer's work which Rumscheidt uses in chapter 8 to demonstrate the need for taking on the sin of violence to prevent the murder of innocent people. In so doing, we take on guilt rather than remain neutral and trust in God's mercy and redemption of the victims.

Moving these arguments further, Rumscheidt references Karl Barth's condemnation of the idolatry of modernity: "when today we speak of God, we really solemnly speak of ourselves in elevated tones and loud volume" (79). This leads to Rumscheidt's focus on neighbour and hospitality, wherein neighbour is the wholly other. He emphasises that those who are honoured at Holocaust memorials "demonstrated that they valued the stranger as someone bearing the image of God shared by all humanity. "The Torah has a name for the 'other': neighbour" (115).

"Hospitality," argues Rumscheidt, "restores respect when the regard of one person recognises the infinite value and work of another" (116). Amid the social struggle to recognise the violation of the other and the work toward reconciliation, the first step forward is not only to see but to honour God in one another. When we trust the wholly other who is our neighbour and welcome them with hospitality, we live more fully into the two most important commandments; to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.

Building on the biblical emphasis on "neighbour", Rumscheidt discusses humanity's general discomfort with alterity, commenting on how well-intentioned justice movements attempt to exert saving strength over those considered the weaker victims. Rumscheidt is brave to comment on how this impacts the conflict in Israel and Palestine. His insights on that conflict should be carefully considered by well-meaning outsiders who wish to weigh in on the subject.

In chapter 20, Rumscheidt argues that "they [German people] were not merely 'following orders' . . . . We thus face an ethic that did not define the arrest, brutalisation, deportation, selection, and gassing of Jews as wrong but, in fact, as ethically tolerable and even as good" (209-211). Adding yet another layer to this theology, Rumscheidt discusses the importance of intentional mourning and an ethic of dissonance that allows grief to be denied. He touches on the crucial notion of cognitive dissonance and how, when moral boundaries are crossed, people either correct their behaviour to match their values or adapt their values to justify their behaviour.

This collection is a testament to the grace and power of reconciliation. It is imperative for theology to encounter and remember suffering, Rumscheidt argues. The labour of mourning is the work of remembering and passing on that memory to the next generation. This is the power of anamnesis, found in the breaking of bread and sharing the cup. We as a society would prefer to avoid this, but it is in the remembering and mourning that we find redemption and grace. Rumscheidt leaves us with Bonhoeffer's practice of *praying and doing justice*: "to do justice in the polis was necessary so that praying did not retreat into self-sufficient piety, while prayer was needed so that doing justice did not turn into ideological arrogance" (230).

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"8 Virtues of Rapidly Growing Churches"
Jason Byassee & Matt Miofsky. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018, pp 110.

*"*Those who can, Do. Those who can't, Teach.*"* This is a cheeky put down of academics, and yet it is also mistaken, flawed thinking. The latest refuting of that old adage comes from former Vancouver School of Theology professor Jason Byassee, who stepped away from the classroom, and returned to active leadership in Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, Toronto.

Jason is joined by Matt Miofsky, a colleague also active in the local church, and together they present a book of practical wisdom applicable to the mainline Protestant world of today. The book uses examples and research acquired in United Methodist congregations. And yet it could be handed to every United Church minister, and Board/Council. In fact, as the United Church launches the new initiative toward growth, and the planting of 100 new ministries and communities of faith, books like this mean we don't start from scratch.

I've been a church growth and renewal "junkie" for decades, benefitting from the wisdom and experience of countless church leaders who were not content to do "maintenance ministry", or just "manage the decline".

There is an urgency in their work and their writing. This book oozes enthusiasm, and urgency, for the task that is being rediscovered in much of the mainline church. Right from the introductory chapter, we are confronted with the challenge: "We are All church planters now . . . All of us have the opportunity to plant something new, in soil fertilized by dead and decaying things. It's smelly, gross and difficult work." Well, yes it is; and yet, put like that, it is also an inspiring challenge, motivating us to recalibrate our vision and goals, toward the greater good of the Church and the cause of Christ.

Like the graphic imagery quoted above, the book has some startling declarations—beginning with the first Virtue that is presented. "Rapidly Growing Churches (RGC's) Believe in Miracles and Act Accordingly". This is a call to live expectantly, almost dangerously, and attempt things that will only succeed "if God shows up". "We have to try things that, if God is not real, will almost certainly fail."

The authors present a series of practical axioms that give helpful instructions for what to emphasize and focus on as we embrace the task of growth. "RGC's . . . Integrate New People Quickly; Love the Local; Exist to Reach the Next Person; Elevate the Practice of Giving; Work in Teams;

Preach Well to the Skeptic; Make Friends with the Denomination".

The authors make it clear very quickly that this brand of outreach and evangelism isn't about the numbers. "What you actually do with the people once they're in the building is what matters most . . . . Help a new guest become a deeply committed follower of Christ".

There are some adages that will pinch a wee bit. When talking of the importance of working in teams, Jason & Matt suggest that RGC's have a 'number two'— that is a person who compliments and balances the 'lead' or 'senior' pastor. This wording makes many uncomfortable, as we seek egalitarian systems in the Christ community. And yet, they do not describe a 'number two' as subservient; rather the 'number two' is loyal to the vision of the congregation more than to the pastor personally."

A happy surprise comes in the final chapter when we are told "RGC's Make Friends with the Denomination." There was a time when innovative pastors complained "… about the boneheads in the denominational office who don't get it." Too true. Back in the 80's & 90's, our Secretary for Evangelism, Tom Bandy, brought to a conference retreat centre, a United Methodist innovator, Bill Easum, whose book "Dancing with Dinosaurs" was gaining favour among many local ministers. Bill Easum taught a session at the retreat center, and then, embarrassingly, was verbally attacked and upbraided by the conference's Executive Secretary.

It is a relief to say those days are over. Our Church is ready now— to work toward the renewal and growth of this denomination. Jason & Matt have given us some terrific advice, drawn from the trenches. And Jason has left academia, to implement his research into a local congregation. These 8 Virtues are applicable in any setting—rural, suburban, inner-city. In fact, I believe, if we could get this book into 1000 pastoral charges, it would generate renewal and growth that would quickly prove the better adage—"those who can, Do, AND . . . they also Teach"!

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